

Addressing Homophobia in Three Secondary Schools in South London

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Abstract

Schools have a responsibility to prevent all forms of bullying, including that related to sexual orientation. However, to date relatively little is known about how schools are successfully tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying. The aim of this study therefore was to generate new knowledge about how three secondary schools in South London, England, were engaging with and addressing homophobia.

A coeducational, a boys' and a girls' school were selected – each having conducted work to counter homophobic bullying. In each school, individual interviews were conducted with three members of staff and group interviews were conducted with pupils drawn from two Year groups (from Year 9, 10 or 11). Information was also drawn from the schools' latest Ofsted report. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and data analysed thematically by way of successive approximation.

Work on homophobia and homophobic bullying was said by staff to be part of the commitment by schools to counter bullying in all its forms, to extend equal opportunities and to promote an inclusive whole school ethos. This they did through policy development, continuing professional development and, in particular, through Personal Social and Health Education and Citizenship. However, more needed to be done in each school to ensure that all staff were competent to address homophobia.

Pupils stated that they were keen that homophobic bullying should be tackled in their school – although some noted that they would find it difficult, themselves, to take an anti-homophobic stance. Pupils stated that work carried out in schools had some influence on them – although as important was personal contact with lesbians and gay men and the media.

Findings are discussed in relation to the utilisation of national policies and programmes, school improvement through preventing homophobia, extending Sex and Relationship Education, and teaching about same-sex sexuality as a non-controversial issue. Implications for my own professional practice are outlined.

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My thanks too, to Peter Aggleton, who supervised the thesis. He provided valued guidance on all stages of the study. Thanks, also, to the internal readers at the Institute of Education for their comments on the final draft of this thesis.

Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Reflective statement

In my current position, as a Senior Research Officer within the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU), Institute of Education, University of London, I have responsibility, among other things, for directing, managing and conducting research. The principal function of TCRU is to carry out policy-relevant research with a particular focus on children and young people within and outwith their families.

Much of my recent research has centred on the health and well-being of children and young people in the UK, although a few other projects have focused on the needs of young people overseas in countries such as South Africa, Mali, Ghana, and states within the former Soviet Union. In addition, my work has also focused on the health and well-being of adults, particularly gay men and HIV prevention.

With most of my research being policy-oriented and often carried out within relatively short time-scales (from a few weeks to 12 months or so) there have been few opportunities to 'stand back', as it were, and reflect on my professional practice. I decided to study for the EdD to have an opportunity to identify and learn more about some of the factors which influenced my practice as a researcher working in health-related education and health promotion.

As it turned out, the structure of the EdD – a series of taught courses, an Institution Focused Study and a thesis, not only allowed me to generate new ideas about some of the factors that shaped my work, but also allowed me to focus substantially on one substantive area – homophobic bullying, young people and education.

In my first assignment for *Foundations of Professionalism*, I critically evaluated the use of different models of health promotion, indicating that these could be classified in three rather different ways – as descriptive, prescriptive and conscriptive. By outlining the key elements of a particular approach to health promotion a model may offer a

description of past practice. A model may be *prescriptive* by serving as a guide to current practice, outlining what can and cannot be done. Finally a model may be *conscriptive* if it draws in practitioners into a project of professionalization – the production of specialist knowledge with which to enhance the status of a profession.

The second assignment for the specialist module *Health-related Education (1)*, my assignment, the *Shaping of professional practice in health education and health promotion*, explored how ideas about what counted as knowledge in health promotion evaluation were shaped by three issues: the re-organisation of the NHS into internal markets, new forms of managerialism, and the promotion of evidence-based practice (see also Ewles, 1996). In responding to these issues, the relationship between health commissioners, service providers and researchers appeared to be changing. Competition rather than cooperation between professional groups was becoming more common. I was concerned that such tendencies would fragment the production of knowledge for policy and practice and privilege certain forms of understandings – such as those most closely aligned with managerialist practice.

Some of the issues raised in these two initial assignments were addressed, more fully I believe, in assignment three, *The benefits of uncertainty: re-positioning the Randomised Controlled Trial in health promotion evaluation*, for *Modes of Enquiry (1)*. In this assignment, I used a summary of Usher's (1996a) work to examine a number of methodological assumptions that had helped position, at that point in time at least, the Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) as the 'gold standard' for evaluation in health promotion. My summary of Usher's (1996a) key points included: the contingent and perspectival nature of knowledge; an understanding of social events as open systems; a decentering of the 'knowing' subject (to play down the exoticism of the researched 'object'); an emphasis on research as social practice engendered by knowledge producing communities; and a concern to address reflexivity.

Thinking about Usher's points raised a series of questions for me relating, among other things, to: the sorts of designs and mix of methods appropriate to particular

forms of enquiry; whether, given the spatial, temporal and social nature of professional practice, we can only identify 'what worked' (rather than 'what works'), (see also, Biesta, 2007); how co-constructed knowledge (Watkins et al, 2002) can best be generated; and what forms of reflexivity can best be employed – instrumental, normative or utopian (Johansson, 2007)?

No fixed and final answers could be provided to such a set of questions – the answers depended on the nature of the research to be conducted, the forms of enquiry that would produce convincing findings for stakeholders, and the resources available to conduct the research – in short, what Patton (1997) has termed, a utilization focused approach.

This assignment was a result, in part, of being vexed by the exclusion of a broad range of social science perspectives from HIV prevention research, so downplaying '...the complexities, contradictions, divisions and needs of the modern world' (Weeks, 1988; p.18; see also Plummer, 1988). Disquiet about the dominance of bio-medical approaches and the exclusion of social scientific perspectives to HIV prevention remains (such as population-based pre-exposure prophylaxis and male circumcision) (AVAC, 2005; Friedman et al, 2006; Paxton et al, 2007; Aggleton, 2007; Berer, 2007; Dowsett & Couch, 2007).

This narrowing view of the possibilities of social research within the field of health education and health promotion coincided with an opening up, in my mind, of the potential of research to engage with and contribute to people's health, well-being and education (Kippax & Kinder, 2002; Kippax, 2003).

In assignments four and five, for *Modes of Enquiry (2)*, and *Health-related Education (2)*, I sought to resolve some of my concerns about research, professional practice and the involvement of clients, respondents or the users of services. In assignment four, I undertake a focused case study of the needs of young gay men living with HIV. This located research activities within a cycle of health promotion practice – so that professional practice was built, not on pathologised or homogenised accounts of

these young men's lives, but on their own sense of the commonalities and differences among and between them. In assignment five, a plan of an evaluation of adherence to anti-HIV treatments, I suggested that taking a critical realist perspective to research would be helpful in resolving – at least partly – the limits of positivist and interpretative approaches. In both assignments, I suggested that what mattered most was seeking to find out about and understand, the needs, concerns and interests of those we engage in our research. We could do this best, I thought, by considering how lives are shaped by macro-, organisational-, interpersonal- and individual factors that, for young lesbians and people living with HIV, are often shaped, not only by stigma and discrimination, but also by resistance to these.

In assignment six, for *Advanced Research Methods*, I developed the background for a study of the health-related needs and concerns of young lesbians in the UK, I noted that there were new opportunities provided by government policies and programmes to develop and implement work with same-sex attracted young women. Recognising and responding to the discrimination faced by young lesbians would require, I suggested, an approach to research in which its values were explicit, its political nature evident, its ethical base transparent and its action-oriented nature, deliberate.

The *Institution Focused Study* (IFS) built upon this earlier work by focusing on an issue often marginalised in education – homophobic bullying. In re-interpreting data collected for a funded project, I wanted to explore some of the hidden assumptions (Slife & Williams, 1995) that had guided the project and which had resulted in a best practice guide to prevent homophobic bullying in secondary schools. In fact, the need for a best practice guide had been decided at the inception of the project. It was decided by the commissioner of the study that this should be a guide that demonstrated that, no matter the type of school, homophobic bullying could be prevented. Furthermore, and in taking guidance from the project's Advisory Group, the guide was to be written with reference to the ten areas that constituted the approach taken by the National Healthy School Standard – including providing

leadership, giving pupils a voice and providing staff professional development activities.

However, I noted in my IFS that my original analysis of the data failed to make sufficient reference to the context of the school – that is, to its existing values and ethos of inclusion or equal opportunities. Universal, context-independent knowledge appeared to be valued over and above that of context-dependent practice and context-dependent deliberation about ethics and values (Flyvbjerg, 2001). To a degree, the project's findings were influenced by a *final cause* (Slife & Williams, 1995) – that is, what a best practice report should look like and the substantive areas it should address (at least as decided through the Advisory Group).

In addition to the issues addressed during the early assignments and the IFS, a number of other factors have influenced what I have learned from the EdD programme: my own situated autobiography as a researcher, for example, the form of writing required by the EdD (see also Scott et al, 2004), the style of research adopted and the links with other writing – what Usher (1996b) terms con-text, pre-text, sub-text and inter-text.

Autobiographically, a range of factors have influenced my learning: past professional practice as a residential social worker, undergraduate courses at the University of Kent on the sociology of the family and the sociology of medicine – and involvement in student union (sexual) politics. All highlighted how issues of power can influence the organisation of people, organisations and societies, with certain groups being systematically privileged and others marginalised.

As a professional doctorate, the EdD has commonalities with and differences from academic doctorates (Scott et al, 2004). For the EdD, the boundaries between academic and practitioner knowledge are relatively 'weak' in comparison with the PhD. The degree of reflexivity needed in writing for the EdD stands as an account of events shaped between the university and the study sites – a reflection on reflection-in-action (Scott et al, 2004)

Regardless of the research approach taken, there are however some common criteria as to what constitutes quality: credibility, trustworthiness or believability, coherency or intelligibility, relevancy and immediacy, and useful, usable, perhaps practical findings that have some 'catalytic authenticity' (Scott et al, 2004: 152; Patton, 1997).

Finally, there appear to be a range of factors that influence professional practice and so a range of perspectives need to inform any study of professionalism – from the macro (associated with gender or sexuality for example), through to national and local policy, organisational and interpersonal dynamics and individual capacities. It is this range of factors that I hope to have captured in my thesis.

My thesis aims to bring all of these issues and concerns together, and focuses on the ways that homophobia and homophobic bullying has been addressed in three secondary schools in South London. Through its design and use of methods I have highlighted gender-related issues (such as the commonalities and differences within and between the coeducational, girls' and boys' schools), organisational factors (related, for example, to the ethos of the school, its policies and professional practices), interpersonal dynamics (through facilitating group discussions among pupils), and individual concerns (regarding, for example, same-sex sexualities).

I have also sought to balance three forms of reflexivity in the thesis, all of which have clear professional relevance to the work I do: the instrumental – to contribute to everyday commonsense; the normative – to persuade; and the utopian – to provide a picture of what life can be like in schools (Johansson, 2007). Although homophobic language is said to be commonplace in schools (NCB, 2007) those who have contributed to this thesis demonstrate that it need not be. Building on their experiences and insights can provide us with a new common-sense of what is possible.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Over the past 20 years, there have been fundamental changes in UK legislation governing same sex relations. These in turn have affected the social climate and individual responses to issues of sexuality. In 1986, when I began work as a research officer at the then Bristol Polytechnic, sexual relationships between men aged under 21 years were illegal. Two years later, the 1988 Local Government Act was passed. Section 28 of the Act stated that a local authority should 'not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.¹

Much has since changed. From January 2001, for example, the age of consent for sexual relationships became equal for gay men, lesbians and heterosexuals. On December 1st, 2003, the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations made it unlawful to discriminate in training or employment against someone because they are or are thought to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. On November 18th, 2004, the Civil Partnership Act was passed, allowing same-sex couples (from December 5th, 2005) to secure legal status for their relationships through civil registration. On April 30th, 2007, the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 made it illegal to discriminate against people on the grounds of their sexual orientation when providing goods or services.²

In schools, too, there has been substantial change. In July, 2000, for example, guidance on Sex and Relationship Education published by the then Department for Education and Employment, indicated that schools should ensure that the needs of *all*

¹ See: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/Ukpga_19880009_en_5.htm Accessed 6 August, 2007.

² See: http://www.stonewall.org.uk/information_bank/criminal_law/default.asp Accessed 24 August, 2007.

pupils should be met – whatever their developing sexuality (DfEE, 2000). Teachers were expected to be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation. Amidst other legislative changes relating to sexual orientation, and with the support of a coalition of children's organisations, education professionals, trades unions and lesbian and gay groups, on September 18th, 2003, Section 28 was removed from the statute books.

Some of the concern among those wishing to see Section 28 repealed related, in part, to their disquiet about the extent and impact of homophobic bullying in schools. There was a growing awareness of the extent of the problem through personal testimonies as well as from research findings (Rivers, 1996; Rivers, 2000)

One study which highlighted the problem of homophobic bullying in schools arose from a project funded by the Stonewall Iris Trust. During 1996, and while working at the Health and Education Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London, Nicola Douglas, Sophie Kemp and Geoff Whitty and I were invited by the Iris Trust to conduct a small-scale survey of, among other things, homophobic bullying in secondary schools.

The report from this work, *Playing it safe* (Douglas et al, 1997) described findings from questionnaires completed by teachers in 307 secondary schools in England and Wales. Respondents indicated they were aware of incidents in their school accompanied by homophobic abuse – 82% of these reported to be verbal bullying and 26% reported to be physical bullying. While nearly all schools in the study (99%) reported having an anti-bullying policy, only 6% of these policies made explicit reference to homophobic-related bullying. Eighty-two percent of respondents stated that they would benefit from clarification of the implications of Section 28 (even though this legislation had never applied directly to work in schools but to the work of local authorities). Forty-four per cent of respondents stated that the continuing existence of Section 28 made it more difficult for them to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils (Douglas et al, 1997).

Drawing on the study, we later prepared (with Peter Aggleton) two articles for refereed journals. One of these focused on teachers' perspectives and explicitly called for Section 28 to be repealed and an equal age of consent to be established. This would, we wrote, '...send a clear policy message to schools to counter the view that there is something inherently wrong or forbidden in discussing homosexuality-related issues with young people, and remove the obstacle to work with school-aged gay and bisexual [young people]' (Douglas et al, 1999: 59).

The other article (Warwick et al, 2001) reviewed policy relevant to sexuality education in secondary schools in England and Wales and outlined implications for future policy, practice and research. The (then) recently established National Healthy School Standard and the final report of the Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools gave new impetus to the promotion of physical and mental health in schools as well as greater respect for personal integrity and worth. This, we believed, offered some encouragement for the future. Perhaps teachers and governors needed no longer to 'play it safe' when addressing issues of sexuality.

A further study of the ways that seven contrasting secondary schools had tackled homophobic bullying resulted in the publication of *Safe for All. A best practice guide to prevent homophobic bullying in secondary schools* (Warwick & Douglas, 2001). This guide was organised around the themes which formed the backbone of the National Healthy School Standard (NHSS), now the National Healthy Schools Programme (NHSP). These themes included the provision of leadership in the area, the development of policy, improving the school culture and climate, extending teaching and learning activities (to include homophobia), giving pupils a voice or say on issues related to homophobia and providing staff training and professional development on homophobia. We used these themes to provide a framework that might be familiar to readers of the guide – who would most likely also be involved in some way in the

NHSS – so that they could see how work to address homophobia might be integrated alongside other health and well-being issues which made up the NHSS.

Three years later, Elaine Chase, Kim Rivers, Peter Aggleton and I were asked by the DfES to conduct a review of what was known about (and to identify gaps in relation to) homophobia, sexual orientation and schools (Warwick et al, 2004). The review set out to examine three sets of key issues: (i) the extent and impact of homophobic bullying on pupils; (ii) how homophobia and sexual orientation was addressed both within classrooms and as part of whole school approaches; and (iii) the extent and ways issues of equity and diversity in relation to sexual orientation are being addressed within the school workforce and the implications this might have for recruitment, retention and promotion.

On the basis of the available evidence, it was possible to state that homophobic bullying existed in many if not all schools and had a negative impact on pupils' well-being, achievements and potentially their attainment. However, on the basis of available evidence, it was not possible to identify the nature or extent of the impact of homophobia on same-sex attracted young people, or on pupils more generally.

We also noted that homophobia and related bullying appeared best engaged with by taking a whole-school approach alongside specific classroom activities. Through the direction provided by senior leadership teams and the expertise of teachers, pupils should be afforded opportunities by way of drama, video and participatory activities to learn about the nature and effects of homophobia and what they might do to counter it. Furthermore, the sorts of working environments supportive of all staff in general (such as upholding principles of diversity and equal opportunities) were likely to support lesbian, gay and bisexual staff in particular.

Overall, there existed a number of opportunities to tackle homophobia and promote inclusion throughout the school community. At that time, there were no less than 15 existing policies and programmes which offered leverage through which homophobia and homophobic bullying could be tackled, including the *Five Year Strategy for*

Children and Learners, Every Child Matters, the National Healthy School Programme, and the National Personal, Social and Health Education Continuing Professional Development Programme.

Although numerous studies (Warwick et al, 2004, Stonewall, 2007) have portrayed schools as routinely homophobic settings, there is also a more positive story to tell. Young lesbians and young gay men reported feeling safer at those schools which explicitly state that homophobic bullying is wrong than in school where such statements are not made (Stonewall, 2007).

It is with these issues in mind that the study which follows was conducted. In particular, and in keeping with my professional interests as a researcher active in the field of education and sexuality, I wanted to focus on some of the more positive aspects of the present response. Of particular interest were the ways in which schools are responding to the challenge of promoting equal opportunities and countering homophobia, using existing policy levers. But also of interest were barriers to progress in the form of social attitudes, institutional structures and individual responses. By focusing on both the positive and the negative, my goal was to acknowledge and appreciate what has been achieved, and to recognise what remains to be done.

Chapter 2 – Background

A growing awareness of bullying

A range of government policies and programmes have, at their heart, the desire to safeguard and protect children and young people from harm and to promote their physical, emotional, intellectual, social and economic well-being (Warwick et al, 2006).

Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a), the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES, 2004b; DfES, 2006a), the *Report of the Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline* (2005), the *National Healthy School Programme* (DH, 2005), and the *Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement* (DfES, 2006b) all offer frameworks at the national level in England to ensure that local authorities and schools themselves can develop their own policies and activities to provide children and young people with a safe and positive learning environment.

Such national policy frameworks have their counterparts in school-level policies and programmes addressing issues such as building a strong ethos in a school which 'promotes tolerance and respect, including respect for difference and diversity' (Ofsted, 2003: 7); having a clear policy statement about bullying which has input from staff, governors and pupils; providing regular training for all staff about identifying bullying and responding to it; and involving pupils in anti-bullying activities (such as 'circles of friends' and peer mediation) (Ofsted, 2003; see also Oliver & Candapa, 2003).

Importantly, many of the above policies and programmes – be they national or at school level – make reference to bullying which is seen as an important issue which *must* be addressed in *every* school.

'Schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are under a legal duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under s.175 *Education Act 2002* ... The guidance states that 'safeguarding' covers more than the contribution

made to child protection in relation to individual children. *'It also encompasses issues such as pupil health and safety and bullying'* (Children's Legal Centre, 2004: 3, original emphasis)

Furthermore,

*'Under s.61 School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA), head-teachers are required **by law** to draft a written policy on measures to prevent all forms of bullying – an anti-bullying policy ... Pupils should be involved in both the drafting of an anti-bullying policy and its monitoring, by being encouraged to discuss the policy and its effectiveness. Involving pupils in this way is compatible with children and young people's right to participate under Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989'* (Children's Legal Centre, 2004: 2)

However, it has not always been the case that concern for bullying has been high on education policy agendas. It took the Elton Report (DES,1989) *Discipline in Schools* as well as the Gulbenkian Foundation's advisory working group on bullying in schools in 1989 to raise awareness of bullying in English schools among academics, policy-makers and practitioners (Smith, 1999). Much of this work built on earlier studies on schooling and violence conducted in Sweden during the 1970s. Findings from this enquiry had highlighted the negative impact of bullying (or 'mobbing' as it was called) on pupils' welfare and achievement (Olweus, 1999).

In England, the popular media had an important role to play in drawing the attention of a wider audience to incidents of bullying (Smith, 1999). With concerns about bullying increasing and with a desire to prevent it, pamphlets, videos and resource packs were produced and disseminated (along with an annotated bibliography about which resource one might best choose) (Smith, 1999).

Bullying in schools has been of international concern too. From the late 1980s, the World Health Organisation conducted four yearly cross-national surveys of the health behaviours of school-aged children, which included questions about bullying (Sanders, 2004). It transpired that bullying was not only a problem for England (or, indeed, Sweden) but was also reported to occur regularly in schools in other countries,

including: Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Spain, Portugal and the USA (Smith et al, 1999).

During the mid-1990s, bullying came to be seen to be associated with a number of factors. Boys, for example, were more likely to bully and be bullied than girls (Smith, 1999). Boys were reported to be more likely to encounter physical harm and threats than girls who, in turn, were more likely to be ignored or have 'bad rumours' spread about them (Smith, 1999). Young people were bullied about their appearance, their ethnic background, being identified as having special needs and being, or perceived to be, lesbian or gay (Gillborn, 1993; Smith, 1999; Rivers, 1996).

While much early concern for bullying focused on its gender and/or ethnic dimensions, being bullied on the grounds of sexuality became a particular focus of concern during the late 1990s. Douglas, et al (1997) for example noted that their study had,

'...revealed a situation where the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils are increasingly recognised and acted upon and where HIV-related education and homophobic-related bullying have become matters of general concern. However, there is still much to do. While a majority of teachers felt that schools were appropriate settings within which to these issues could be addressed, the lack of clear policy and guidance, continued confusion about Section 28, and a lack of training and opportunities for discussion made many teachers uncertain about how best to proceed' (p.63).

Importantly, disquiet about the experiences of young lesbians and young gay men at school had been raised some ten to fifteen years earlier by Trenchard and Warren (1984). Their booklet, *Something to Tell You* described the violence experienced at schools by young lesbian, gay and bisexual people in London. A replication of this study (Ellis and High, 2004) noted that while some progress had been made in secondary schools, in that homosexuality was on occasions discussed, young lesbian and gay respondents stated that on the whole they found these discussions to be 'unhelpful' (*ibid* p. 223): homosexuality was perceived to be 'just another topic' (*ibid*

p. 221) addressed by the school, was pathologised and was also viewed negatively by some teachers.

Teachers and schools have been seen to be at the forefront of initiatives to prevent bullying, chiefly because schools were the very sites in which violence against children and young people took place. A number of programmes and resources have been provided to schools, such as the DfE Anti-Bullying Project (carried out during the early 1990s) (Smith, 1999) and the more recent *Bullying, Don't Suffer in Silence* (DfES, 2000), and guidance on countering prejudice-driven bullying in schools.³ Although a range of school-based anti-bullying approaches and programmes have been tried (Sanders, 2004), those which have been evaluated – whether in England or other European or North American countries – show varying rates of success (Smith et al, 2004).

A recent report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2006), itself a response to concerns raised by children and young people, highlights that further action needs to be taken to tackle bullying. As the report notes, addressing bullying has become part of the 'core business' (*ibid* p.5) of many local authorities through their Children's and Young People's Plans. While work in schools remains central to the prevention of bullying, there is now a drive to extend anti-bullying activities beyond their boundaries and out into the community as part of a broader response to hate-, bias- or prejudice-driven crime, including that related to homophobia (House of Commons Education & Skills Committee, 2007).

Bullying, homophobia and homophobic bullying

Definitions of bullying have been the subject of considerable debate. Drawing on children's and young people's own accounts, Olweus (1999) stated that, 'A student is being bullied or victimised when he or she is being exposed, repeatedly and over time,

³ See: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/racistbullying/> Accessed 13 August 2007

to negative actions on the part of one or more students' (p. 10). This is similar in a number of ways to the current UK government's definition of bullying as,

- 'Repetitive, wilful or persistent behaviour intended to cause harm, although one-off incidents can in some cases also be defined as bullying:
- Intentionally harmful behaviour, carried out by an individual or a group; and
- An imbalance of power leaving the person being bullied feeling defenceless.' (House of Commons Education & Skills Committee, 2007: 7)

Bullying may be verbal and/or physical in nature and can include practices such as name-calling, taunting, making offensive comments, gossiping, excluding people from social situations, kicking and hitting (Smith, 1999). More recently, cyber-bullying – by email or text message, for example – has generated questions as to what teachers and schools can or should do about this misuse of new technologies (House of Commons Education & Skills Committee, 2007; Smith et al, 2006).

As the Education and Skills Committee report notes, attempts have been made to distinguish bullying from teasing and fighting – usually by way of stating that bullying is a repeated act and involves some sort of power imbalance between bullies and those bullied (Smith, 1999). Some commentators have argued that what distinguishes bullying from teasing is the latter has a degree of enjoyment in it for both parties (Education and Skills Committee, 2007). Others have argued that such broad definitions leave open the possibility that children will complain of being bullied when they had '... fallen out with a friend but not necessarily if they were actually being bullied.' (House of Commons Education & Skills Committee, 2007: 8).

As with bullying in general, homophobia and homophobic bullying more particularly have been defined in a number of ways. Herek (2004), for example, traces the 'invention of homophobia' (p.7) to the work of George Weinberg, a psychologist, trained in psychoanalytic techniques based in the USA.

'It was in September of 1965, while preparing an invited speech for the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO) banquet, that Weinberg hit upon the idea that would develop into homophobia (...) he was reflecting on the fact that many heterosexual psychoanalysts evinced strongly negative personal reactions to being around a homosexual in a non-clinical setting. It occurred to him that these reactions could be described as a phobia:

"I coined the word homophobia to mean it was a phobia about homosexuals....It was a fear of homosexuals which seemed to be associated with a fear of contagion, a fear of reducing the things one fought for—home and family. It was a religious fear and it had led to great brutality as fear always does.'" (p.7)

Herek notes that there are a number of assumptions built into the term: homophobia is seen as something which is underpinned by fear, is pathological, and (although not necessarily so) generally refers to heterosexual's attitudes to gay men, so excluding reference to lesbians.

Turning from affect to effect, the Crown Prosecution Service in their *Policy for Prosecuting Cases with a Homophobic Element* states that a homophobic incident is, 'Any incident which is perceived to be homophobic or transphobic by the victim or by any other person' – this definition echoing that of other types of hate incidents, such as those associated with racism.⁴

A definition of homophobic bullying, adopted by Douglas et al (1997) states that it '...takes place where general bullying behaviours such as verbal and physical intimidation is accompanied by or consists of the use of terms such as gay, lesbian, queer or lezzie by perpetrators' (p.12)

The nature and forms of homophobic bullying are in many ways similar to those of bullying more generally (Douglas et al, 1997). That said, concern has been expressed about the degree of violence associated with some incidents of homophobic bullying (and the responses to being bullied). For some incidents, the term, 'bullying' is hardly adequate to describe the level of violence perpetrated and experienced. For example,

⁴ See: <http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/hmpbcrleaf.html> Accessed 11 June, 2007

in one study, respondents who had been homophobically bullied reported their clothes being set alight, having chemicals thrown on them during science lessons, being urinated upon, being burned with cigarettes while held down, being dragged around a school playing field by the hair and being raped (Rivers, 1996).

More recently, Kimmel and Mahler (2003) have linked the 'random' school shootings in some schools in the USA to homophobic bullying. 'Most of the boys', they state, 'who opened fire were mercilessly and routinely teased and bullied and (...) their violence was retaliatory against the threats to [their] manhood (...) the specific content of the teasing and bullying [was] homophobic' (p. 1439).

Extent of bullying

Given this range of definitions – from the lay, to the academic, to the official – it is perhaps unsurprising that estimates of the incidence and prevalence of bullying in schools vary markedly. Some studies suggest that up to 60% of children and young people have experienced bullying at school at one time or another. Others, using a more restricted definition have found there to be around 20-30% of primary and 10-20% of secondary school pupils have experienced bullying at some time (Thompson, 2000). While there appears to be a fairly steady decrease in reports of being bullied from ages of 8 to 16 years (Smith, 1999), one study has suggested that this may be due, at least in part, to older pupils being more unwilling than younger pupils to report bullying (Oliver and Candappa, 2003).

Given the challenges of defining and operationalising concepts such as homophobia and homophobic bullying, of sampling same-sex young people, and of taking into account the concerns that young people may have in reporting to teachers or parents and carers that they have been homophobically bullied (Rivers, 2001; ChildLine, 2006), estimating the incidence and prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools poses particular challenges. That said, a number of studies conducted in the UK and the USA have suggested that between 30-50% of lesbian and gay young people have experienced some form of homophobic harassment in educational settings (Mason &

Palmer, 1996; Hillier, et al, 1998; Rivers & Duncan, 2002; King and McKeown; 2003; Ellis & High, 2004).

Some of these studies have asked samples of adult lesbians and gay men to state whether they experienced bullying or harassment at school on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. Others have asked same-sex attracted young people directly. And little work to date focused on homophobic name-calling or the abuse directed towards non same-sex attracted pupils who are the butt of homophobic name-calling and abuse – a concern of some children and young people (O'Shaughnessy et al 2004; ChildLine, 2006). This makes it difficult to estimate the proportions and/or actual numbers of all those who have experienced homophobic bullying.

Impact of bullying

Bullying has implications for the immediate- and longer-term physical and emotional well-being of children and young people, and can also impact on their ability to achieve at school. Studies have found the shorter-term effects of bullying to include: loss of confidence, diminished self-esteem, becoming withdrawn and nervous, beginning to do badly in academic work, truancy, school phobia and attempted suicide (Elliot & Kilpatrick, 1994; Fekkes, 2005). A cross-sectional study conducted in 28 countries found there to be a consistent and strong association between bullying and a range of physical and psychological symptoms including headache, stomach ache, backache, dizziness, bad temper, feeling nervous, feeling low, difficulties in getting to sleep, morning tiredness, feeling left out, loneliness and helplessness. Furthermore, the number of symptoms reported increased with increasing exposure to bullying (Due et al, 2005).

In the longer term, adults who have experienced bullying at school can experience depression, social isolation, psychosomatic disease, anxiety attacks and agoraphobia (Elliot & Kilpatrick, 1994; Fekkes, 2005). There is, however, some discussion regarding whether bullying precedes complaints about ill-health or whether health complaints

precede bullying and victimisation. Children and young people with existing health complaints may be more vulnerable to being bullied by other children (Fekkes, 2005).

Those who have consistently bullied without support to stop their aggression may, in the longer term, experience uncontrollable and aggressive behaviour, be involved in aggressive and delinquent behaviour and experience difficulties in maintaining employment and/or long-term relationships (Elliot and Kilpatrick, 1994; Fekkes, 2005).

The impact of homophobic bullying in the shorter to longer-term appears to be similar in a number of ways to the effects of bullying more generally, with physical and emotional symptoms being experienced as well as disruptions to schooling and academic study (Rivers, 2000; Rivers, 2001, Trotter, 2006). Of special concern, are reports of suicidal ideation (considering suicide) and attempted suicide among young lesbians and young gay men (Russell, 2003; D'Augelli et al, 2001; Paul et al, 2002).

However, the impact of homophobic bullying can extend to pupils other than those who feel attracted to others of the same sex (O'Shaughnessy et al, 2004; Childline, 2005; Education and Skills Committee, 2007). For example, children and young people with lesbian mothers and/or gay fathers may be bullied about the sexual identity of their parents (Clarke, 2001). More recently, the use of term 'gay' is said to be used by some pupils as a '... generic put-down aimed at anything of which they disapprove or dislike' (NCB, 2007: p.9; see also Swain, 2003).

Homophobia, sexuality & gender

Homophobia and heteronormativity (beliefs and practices underpinned by an assumption that all people are, or should be, heterosexual) contribute to the construction of dominant and subordinate masculinities and femininities in schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Youdell, 2005). The constitution of heterosexuality as the sexual norm, '...through policy, during lessons and by way of everyday conversations, jokes and gossip creates a context within which certain young people (and also teachers and parents) come to think of themselves as, in some way, less than normal'

(Warwick et al, 2001: 131). It does not appear to matter whether a young person who is homophobically bullied, teased or 'cussed' is actually gay or lesbian. What matters more is the way that pupils interpret certain actions (Epstein, et al, 2003). In writing about homophobia among boys, Epstein et al (2003) note,

'Anything from smiling at someone, to touching someone accidentally, or saying one stupid thing can result in being called 'gay', which is [the boys] agree with the interviewer, 'the worst thing' that could happen.' (p.124).

Whether or not they identify as gay, boys have been noted to be perhaps particularly sensitive to comments that call into question their heterosexuality and masculinity – developing gendered and sexed hierarchies not only among themselves but also between themselves and girls (Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Paechter, 2003; Stoudt, 2006). Pascoe (2007) noted, during fieldwork within a 'ferociously heteronormative context' (p.161) in the USA that male high school pupils not only routinely mocked the unmasculine, but also 'invested in and reproduced meanings of masculinity as heterosexual and agentic' (p.158).

In infant and primary as well as secondary schools, studies have noted how pupils strive towards adopting a valued and positive identity – sometimes underpinned by heteronormative values (Connolly, 2004; Swain, 2003). Boys' competence in sporting activities, wearing the right sorts of clothes and pursuing relationships with girls can confer a status denied to peers not involved in such activities (Ashley, 2003; Paechter, 2003; Renold, 2000; Swain, 2002; Swain, 2003). A number of young men, including those from Black and minority ethnic communities, may pursue what can be described as a 'hyper-heterosexual' masculinity, including the display of sexual prowess, violence or the desire to be seen as 'studs' in their primary school classes or schools (Renold, 2007).

Girls too are influenced by, and influence, how to be a girl or young woman or how best to become one (Reay, 2001). They may position themselves in a number of ways with regard to gender in primary schools, such as being 'nice girls', 'girlies' and 'tomboys' (Reay, 2001). For some girls, including those from working class, ethnically

diverse inner-city settings, striving towards a valued identity can lead them to invest in '... 'glamorous' heterofemininities (...) and ladette discourse' (Archer et al, 2007: 165). Furthermore, physically active girls can have their heterosexuality questioned due to assumed links between a somewhat male image of sport and lesbianism (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002) and this can limit girls' willingness to participate in sporting activities. It may also affect their personal relationships with boys who may be being teased for not going out with a 'proper' girl (Cockburn & Clark, 2002).

Much of this research is underpinned by theories of gender – and of sexuality – which broadly take a socially constructed (Francis, 2006; Mellor & Epstein, 2006) and, more particularly, a materialist and post-structuralist position (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007). Gender relations are formed through intersections of 'different forms of power, stratification, desire and subjective identity formation' (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007: 9)

Thus, the means by which young people's gender- and sexuality-related identities are constructed are associated, in part, with their day-to-day social interactions in and around schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Epstein et al, 2003; Allen, 2005). Identities are to a degree, strategically constructed, contested and crafted through the dynamics of everyday life – in short, there is agency in the ways in which girls become girls and boys become boys (Davison & Frank, 2006). However, identities are also circumscribed by the opportunities and constraints provided through the routine organisation and experiences of school life (Epstein, 2003; Paechter, 2006). And as Youdell (2005) has argued, gender and sexual identities in secondary schools are constructed to a degree through interpretations of '... students' mundane and day-to-day practices – including bodily deportment, physical games, linguistic accounts, and uses of clothing, hairstyles and accessories' (p.249).

This is not to say that interpersonal, organisational, social, cultural and historical factors and experiences out of school play no part in young people's gendered and sexual lives, they clearly do (Connell, 1987; Butler, 2003; Weeks, 2003). However, it is

to recognise that what is available to young people in schools – through its curriculum in its broadest sense – has an important, but not necessarily decisive part, to play in the ways that pupils reproduce and transform, or perform, femininities and masculinities (Butler, 1996; Youdell, 2005; Clegg, 2006).

A pupil's particular feminised or masculinised way of being may have implications for learning. For example, some in-depth studies have noted that among certain boys and young men their masculinity may be defined in opposition to studiousness, so limiting their interest in, and capacity to, learn (Martino, 1999, Renold, 2001). For girls, too, some young women's '... investments in particular forms of heterosexual working-class femininity can encourage disengagement from education and schooling.' (Archer et al, 2007: 165).

It would be a mistake, though, to portray all, perhaps most, young people as consistently and routinely homophobic. Some, for example, have involved themselves in 'Gay-Straight Alliances' (GSA) – groups which generally aim to 'create safe environments in schools for students to support each other and learn about homophobia and other oppressions, educate the school community about homophobia, gender identity, and sexual orientation issues, and fight discrimination, harassment, and violence in schools'.⁵ Existing more commonly in the USA than in England, young people participating in such groups can face considerable discrimination, yet they can also find such environments a source of support and a place in which ways of countering homophobia more generally can be developed (see, for example, Pascoe, 2007).

Furthermore, young people's understandings, experiences and expressions of sexuality appear, perhaps, less fixed than once they were. Drawing on earlier work by Berger et al (1974), Bauman (1990) and Giddens (1991), Johansson (2007) has argued for a 'post-traditional identity' – perhaps more accurately, identities – marked by

⁵ See: <http://www.gsanetwork.org/about/index.html> Accessed 15 June 2006

relative openness (with no unequivocal definition of identity), differentiation (a range of masculinities and femininities are possible); reflexivity (defining and redefining themselves in the light of multiple sources of information), and individuation (involving a reflexive position with regard to collective affiliation). There may, for example, be a range of ways of being a girl at school – with girls seeking out particular identities (not necessarily as heterosexual) that are made both possible by and constrained by their class, material position, attainment at school understandings of ‘hetero-femininity’ (Youdell, 2005) and their position in an increasingly globalised world (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007).

Of particular importance is to recognise young people’s agency in being or becoming (whether related, for example, to gender, sexuality, ethnicity or learning). In paying attention to what is around them, young people are themselves involved in deciding who and how they want to be (even though this cannot be solely individually determined).

Preventing bullying – national policies and guidance

In both *The Children Act (2004)* and *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004a), there is the requirement and ambition that, whatever their background or circumstances, children and young people should be provided with the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being (DfES, 2004a). As has been shown, bullying on whatever kind can compromise children’s and young people’s progress in any or all of these outcomes (Biddulph, 2006; Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2006).

The more recently published *Ofsted framework for the inspection of schools in England* (Ofsted, 2005), requires inspectors to report on, among other things, how far the education provided by a school meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school, the educational standards achieved, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, and the contribution made by the school to the well-being of pupils.

Recent DfES (2004) guidance on social inclusion and pupil support states that schools are required to have a clear behaviour policy which should,

‘... make clear the boundaries of what is acceptable, the hierarchy of sanctions, arrangements for their consistent and fair application, and a linked system of rewards for good behaviour. It should promote respect for others, intolerance of bullying and harassment, the importance of self-discipline and the difference between “right” and “wrong”.’ (DfES, 2005a: para 2)

The same guidance states that a school’s governing body is required to develop a written statement of principles that take into account the needs of all pupils and which address the ethos of the school (its values and boundaries of acceptable behaviour), the moral code of the school, rules of conduct, and the sorts of rewards and punishment to be used. This written statement should be developed in consultation with the range of school community members (including pupils, parents and carers).

In line with the governors’ written statement, the headteacher is responsible for promoting good behaviour. Furthermore, headteachers should develop and put in place anti-bullying strategies in consultation with other school staff, pupils and parents. The school’s prospectus (along with other documents for staff, pupils and parents) should explain how pupils should report bullying to staff and what action staff will take to respond to, address and prevent it.

Schools are required to prevent and respond to all forms of bullying – including homophobic bullying. As the DfES guidance on social inclusion and pupil support makes clear:

‘The emotional distress caused by bullying in whatever form – be it racial, or as a result of a child’s appearance, behaviour or special educational needs, **or related to sexual orientation** – can prejudice school achievement, lead to lateness or truancy and, in extreme cases, end with suicide (...) Pupils should be encouraged to report any bullying to staff or to older pupils they can trust. Low report rates should not of themselves be taken as proof that bullying is not occurring (DfES, 2005: para 28, emphasis added)

Guidance on Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) (DfEE, 2000), states that SRE should be relevant and sensitive to the needs of all pupils – whatever their developing sexuality. In addition, teachers are expected to be able to ‘deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support’. (DfEE, 2000:13).

Preventing bullying - programmes and resources

A range of resources and support is available to assist schools to respond to some of these issues and so to counter bullying. An anti-bullying week, for example, is currently held during November each year. The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA), launched in 2004, has anti-bullying experts in each of the nine local government office regions of England who provide advice and support to those in schools, local education authorities and to parents to assist them prevent and respond to bullying.⁶ A series of websites provide advice, recommendations, tips, lesson plans, reading lists and even anti-bullying poetry.⁷ An anti-bullying charter, to be signed by the Chair of governors, the headteacher, a pupil representative and displayed publicly in the school is available to demonstrate the commitment of those in schools to tackling bullying.

A number of written anti-bullying resources are also available. *Don't Suffer in Silence*, (DfES, 2000) for example, provides guidance on how different forms of bullying might best be addressed in schools – including that related to race, gender, disability and sexual orientation.⁸ Guidance on countering prejudice driven bullying is now available,

⁶ See: <http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/Page.asp> Accessed 13 June 2007

⁷ See, for example: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/> Accessed 13 June 2007

⁸ See: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/antibullyingpack/> Accessed 13 June 2007

the first of these addressing racist bullying with follow up materials being produced to address homophobic bullying (NCB, 2007).⁹

There are a number of factors that appear to contribute to the success of anti-bullying strategies in schools (Smith et al, 2004). Effective approaches often address the organisational and institutional factors that impact the development of bullying and anti-social behaviour in schools. These include poor quality relationships between staff and pupils, low staff morale, high teacher turnover, lack of consistent discipline, lack of engagement with children as individuals, and failure to respond appropriately to racist and sexist incidents (Oliver & Candappa, 2003). Moreover, effective approaches generally advocate a 'whole-school' approach to tackling bullying.

Recently published guides to addressing homophobia and bullying have also sought to highlight the importance of taking a whole-school approach (Warwick & Douglas, 2001; Jennett, 2004). They also highlight what actions and activities might be taken to more specifically address issues related to homophobia, such as: critically reviewing imagery of hetero- and homosexuality, discussing the importance of being able to define one's own sexual orientation and identifying the visible participation (or otherwise) of lesbians and gay men in society.

Although these guides point to the importance of explicitly focusing on lesbian and gay issues, they have rather less to say about gender, ethnicity and class which, as noted, are also linked to beliefs about (or expressions of) homophobia (Stoudt, 2006; Youdell, 2005; Archer et al, 2007). Furthermore, some authors have noted a clustering of 'intolerant' beliefs, whereby a higher level of, for example, racism, tends to correlate with higher levels of sexism and homophobia (Citizenship 21, 2003; Aosved & Long, 2006).

⁹ See: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/racistbullying/> Accessed 13 June 2007

School improvement and bullying

There are a number of similarities between those resources that take a whole-school approach to addressing bullying and the approach advocated by the National Healthy School Programme in England which aims to support children and young people to be healthy, to raise their achievement and to promote social inclusion.¹⁰ This, perhaps, is unsurprising, given that both were informed by models of school improvement which suggested there were certain common characteristics of effective schools. These include providing a calm learning environment, having teaching that is responsive to pupils' needs, and imposing clear and fair discipline (Sammons et al, 1995).

Pupils' own perceptions about how best to improve their learning are now seen to be a central feature of discussions regarding school improvement (Reed & Lodge, 2006; Fielding, 2007). *Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools* (DfES, 2004c) states that, 'Pupil performance and well-being go hand in hand. Pupils cannot learn if they don't feel safe ...' (DfES, 2004c: 1). And the *Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement 2006-2007* (DfES, 2006b) notes the important links between pupils' learning and their emotional health and well-being as well as the need to achieve an appropriate climate for teaching and learning for all staff and pupils.

But even in those schools which have relatively successfully countered violence (Watkins et al, 2007), one area often left unaddressed has been that of homophobia (Epstein et al, 2003; Watkins et al, 2007). As Epstein et al (2003) note:

'Some teachers and schools, while aware of homophobia as a problem that can lead to violence, shrink from developing policies to challenge homophobia because of fear of parents and/or negative publicity for their schools. Others ignore the issue, either not noticing or ignoring the existence of any problem.' (Epstein et al, 2003: 132-133).

If school improvement is predicated on achieving an appropriate climate in which all pupils can learn, and if schools are to be safe settings in which pupils' emotional

¹⁰ See: <http://www.healthyschools.gov.uk/> Accessed 13 June 2007

health and well-being is promoted, improvement is unlikely to come about in schools in which homophobic bullying is ignored.

Yet some schools have taken active steps to challenge homophobia and bullying (Warwick & Douglas, 2001). There is, perhaps, something to learn from staff and pupils at these schools regarding the challenges, opportunities, successes and setbacks in tackling homophobia.

It was with these issues in mind that this study was designed. It aimed to generate new knowledge about how those in schools have tackled homophobia and bullying. In particular, and engaging with *lacunae* in the research literatures reviewed above, the study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What sorts of issues, problems and incidents are perceived to have led to homophobia being addressed?
- In what ways have those in schools sought to address homophobia – and what factors are perceived to have hindered such work taking place?
- What views are held about homophobia and bullying among those in schools?
- How have responses to homophobic bullying shaped teachers' and pupils' sense of themselves?

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Theoretical background

As stated earlier, the main purpose of this study was to generate new understandings of the ways in which schools have, or have not, been able to address homophobia (and homophobic bullying) through policy and practice. While there have already been a number of studies of homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools these have, as noted in the previous chapter, painted a generally bleak picture – identifying high and somewhat intransigent levels of homophobic prejudice and bullying in many school environments. Furthermore, there have as yet been no UK studies of the perceptions of staff and pupils as to what might contribute to the reduction or prevention of homophobia and homophobic incidents in a school.

Research (e.g. Warwick et al, 2001) has pointed to the value of taking what might be called a genealogical approach to examining homophobia in schools (Laskey & Beavis, 1996; Dean, 1999). This would encourage an exploration of: (i) the issues related to sexuality that are made visible in and school (as well as those that appear to be rendered absent); (ii) the means through which certain ‘truths’ (in this case with regard to homophobia) come to be established; (iii) the forms of knowledge about homophobia that come to be seen as ‘true’ within a school; and (iv) the forms of identity through which the life of the school is governed – and the forms of identity to which ways of governing give rise.

In addition, good practice guides on the prevention of homophobic bullying in secondary schools suggest there to be a number of key factors that contributed to change, including the need to: identify homophobia as a problem; lead and manage change; involve a broad range of school community members (such as staff, pupils and parents); and provide staff development opportunities (Warwick & Douglas, 2001;

Jennet et al, 2004). These factors are based on those which constitute an approach to developing Healthy Schools (DfEE, 1999a; DfEE, 1999b) and which, in turn, draw on earlier research in England which identified a cluster of 11 key characteristics of effective schools (Sammons et al, 1995).

The literature on developing health and effective schools resonates with a broader approach to social enquiry, critical realism (Robson, 2002). This argues that, in order to understand ‘...the ‘textured’ or interwoven nature of different levels and dimensions of social reality’ (Layder, 1993: 7) and to appreciate the ‘multifaceted nature of the empirical world’ (Layder, 1993: 7) a layered or stratified model of society is needed. Layder’s research ‘map’ (Layder, 1993: 8) consists of five elements: the self (a persons’ biographical experience and social involvements); situated activity (the dynamics of face-to-face interaction); the setting (the immediate environment of social activity – such as a school); the context (such as structural social forms – including class, gender and ethnic relations) and a historical dimension applicable to them all.

In seeking to bridge macro and micro factors, Layder looks to the development of ‘middle range’ theory influencing social life in which society is viewed as a series of ‘interdependent layers’ (Layder, 1993: 8) in which no single level can be explained by, or reduced to, another privileged standpoint. The image of the social he uses is influenced by the work of Harré and Secord (1972) and Bhaskar (1979), among others, and provides an alternative to conventional positivism. It aims to ‘preserve a ‘scientific’ attitude towards social analysis at the same time as recognizing the importance of actors’ meanings and in some way incorporating them into research’ (Layder, 1993: 16).

Pawson and Tilley (1997), take a scientific or critical realist approach to understand the nature of social programmes. Human actions, they suggest, are ‘embedded’ (in that they take place within a socially stratified society); are part of a social process (guided, to a degree, by choice but with regard to available resources); are contextual

(in that processes are contingent on context); are patterned (in that there is a degree of regularity to them); and yet undergo change (in that the contextual conditions influencing them, alter).

Research strategy and methods

Understanding the nature of life in schools (and elsewhere) in this way – a particular ontological position – has epistemological consequences with regard to how and what data are to be collected.

For the current study, a questionnaire survey of pupils' knowledge and attitudes regarding homophobia could, in principle, yield some information about their individual views and behaviours. A series of qualitative interviews, while providing a more complex image of their perceptions and practices, may still capture little of the complexity of the ways that homophobia is played out or prevented within schools.

Moreover, the layering of contextual, organisational, interpersonal and individual factors that influence the expression of homophobia within a school (such as the gender, ethnic and religious backgrounds or staff or pupils; the school's ethos, leadership, policies and curriculum; the characteristic and quality of relationships; the interests, concerns and commitments of staff and pupils) suggests that information would need to be gathered from sources other than pupils alone.

Methodologically, and drawing on the genealogical concerns outlined above, what is therefore needed is a research strategy which holds the potential to identify the reasons why homophobia comes to be seen as a problem to be tackled within the school, the ways in which certain values, practices and realities are part of school life, and the effects that new commitments and actions have on those in the school.

One potentially useful strategy which may be used to enquire into a 'contemporary phenomenon' in a real-life context, where the boundaries 'between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2003:13), is the case study. Existing as one of a number of flexible research designs (Robson, 2002), the case study shares with them a

number of design features in having: an overall aim or purpose and explicit set of research questions; an identification of the case(s) or unit(s) of analysis; a series of steps or procedures for collecting data or information; criteria for analysis; and a means of reporting findings.

While findings from a single case study may strongly reflect the dynamics of that particular case, they may also be influenced by biases introduced through the research process. To address this, at least in part, a number of case studies can be conducted at the same time with the aim of producing broadly similar findings (literal replication) or with the aim of producing contrasting results but for identified reasons (theoretical replication) (Yin, 2003). Moreover, conducting a number of related case studies can be useful for purposes of analytic generalisation – that is, drawing on insights gained through the case study to construct a reasoned argument as to their transferability or applicability to broadly similar settings (Yin, 2003; Robson, 2002; Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

In response to these arguments for replication, given the influence that gender may have on the nature and extent of homophobia (Phoenix et al, 2003; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002), and making the most of the resources available for the study (and bearing in mind the possible relevance to practitioners of knowing that homophobia can be addressed in different types of schools), three contrasting cases were selected: a girls', a boys' and a coeducational school.

An exploratory and flexible case study design was used to guide data collection, with each case study focussing on a description and analysis of:

- The overall school context (the type of school, its general ethos, its types of pupils, its history of addressing other issues related, for example, to gender and ethnicity, its culture of support for pupils)
- The activities that took place to address homophobia and bullying (across a school, within classroom settings, during assemblies)

- The actors involved in this work (such as senior managers, form tutors, school nurses, links with outside professionals)
- The reasons for particular activities (or sets of these) being put in place
- The pupils that took part in these activities (such as particular year groups or those taking certain courses of study)
- Whether and in ways the activities were perceived as leading to change (among staff, pupils and others) and lessons learned for future work

Selection of schools

The overall aim of this study, to identify the activities and possible impact of activities to address homophobia, meant it was necessary to identify schools that had actually conducted work in this area. Although quite a number of schools across England are known to have addressed homophobia (Warwick et al, 2001; Mulholland, 2003), it was decided to select three secondary schools located in a single local education authority. There were three main reasons for doing so.

First, schools would have a degree of similarity between them with regard to LEA policies and support. Second, the resource constraints associated with the study would mean that travel to, and personal contact with, schools were manageable. Third, schools could be selected according to the similar sorts of contact each had with one particular local lesbian, gay and bisexual community agency, the *LGB Centre*.¹¹

The *LGB Centre*, set up in 1983, originally provided a telephone and information line as well as social and support groups for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Currently, it works with a range of mainstream organisations to provide consultancy and diversity training with the aim of improving health, education and other public services for

¹¹ The name of the Centre has been changed to protect anonymity

lesbians, gay and bisexual people. It also runs youth groups for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people.

Staff at the *LGB Centre* have actively engaged a number of schools in one the LEAs they serve through the provision of staff professional development activities and facilitation of workshops with pupils. The *LGB Centre* also promotes the work of a theatre in education group, the *Big Fish Theatre Company* which has among its productions, one that addresses homophobic bullying for Key Stage 4 pupils. *Them and Us*, 'aims to help raise awareness of bullying in relation to sexuality or race and to help pupils and teachers tackle this unacceptable behaviour in their own environments.'¹² This 'interactive theatre performance' consists of a play followed by a workshop. Support materials are available for teachers to follow up issues raised by a performance.

Each school selected was not only drawn from the same LEA, but also had similar contact with the *LGB Centre*. Staff in each school had taken part in a training event focused on homophobia facilitated by a member of staff from the *LGB Centre*.

In two of the schools, pupil workshops had been facilitated by the Schools' Worker from the *LGB Centre*. In the third school, work was being undertaken by a teacher in the school who also worked part-time at the *LGB Centre*. Pupils in each of the case study schools had seen a performance of *Them and Us*.

Initial preparation

A number of activities were conducted during the Spring Term, 2005 prior to case study visits. The aim in carrying out these activities was to identify some of the current issues facing lesbian and gay young people in the area and to identify what work might be referred to during the case studies themselves. I conducted these activities for a number of reasons.

¹² <http://www.bigfishtheatre.com/pastshows-themandus.htm> Accessed 22 May, 2007

I was aware, for example, that I had not worked with lesbian and gay young people for a number of years and wanted to re-familiarise myself with issues facing them. This was particularly the case with regard to issues encountered by young lesbians – especially as a colleague I had worked with for a number of years, and who had an understanding of the lives of young lesbians, had left the research unit in which I worked.

In addition, I wished to check whether there continued to be a degree of complexity in the ways that the lives of young lesbians and young gay men were lived. By that, I mean that I was concerned that I was over familiar with particular themes highlighted in research reports (such as narratives of bullying), popular magazines (which perhaps overplayed popular cultural and consumerist issues) or partial professional accounts (which might over-emphasise the help and support needed by, or provided to, young people).

I also wanted to understand the background to the work in schools, as seen through the eyes of practitioners at the *LGB Centre*. This partly related to identifying what work had taken place but also, I suspect, had other meanings too. I wanted, for example, to demonstrate to the *LGB Centre* staff that I had an interest in their work and valued what they were seeking to do. In return, I also hoped that they would value the aims and ideas behind the study – and by extension, my own work (and self) as a research practitioner. Although I had worked in the field of sexuality for a number of years, I nonetheless needed to continue to question my own knowledge base and values, this being of particular importance when conducting research on ‘sensitive’ topics (Ingham et al, 1999; Elam & Fenton, 2003).

The activities I conducted included:

- A guided discussion with a young lesbian and a young gay man and his mother
- A guided discussion with the family therapist at the *LGB Centre*

- A guided discussion with the Schools' Worker at the *LGB Centre*
- A guided discussion with a youth worker at the *LGB Centre* (who also taught in one of the case study schools)
- An analysis of feedback sheets gathered by the *LGB Centre* following their facilitation of workshops with pupils in two of the case study schools¹³
- Personal reflection on conducting the case studies

The guided discussions

In order to become sensitised to some of the issues facing lesbian and gay pupils, a series of relatively unstructured pilot interviews were conducted with a young lesbian who had recently left school, a young gay man still at school (in Year 12) and the young gay man's mother (they all lived in the same area of London in which case study schools were located). Respondents were asked to identify issues related to homophobic bullying in schools they attended (or, for the mother, that her son attended); what they perceived to be the causes of homophobia in schools; what activities, if any, were in place to prevent homophobia; and what support they believed was available to those who had been bullied.

Each respondent had come across homophobia and homophobic bullying – both within and out of school. They stated that there was a degree of variability in the ways schools tackled homophobia and in how support was provided to those affected by it. For example, respondents stated that they had to take complaints to a specific teacher, one who was known to be supportive regarding these issues. Some teachers were perceived to be more accepting of same-sex relationships than others and some teachers were viewed as being homophobic themselves. The young gay man's mother expressed concern that more had not been done to protect her son from bullying, despite a number of complaints to the school.

¹³ Feedback sheets were only available from two of the three case study schools

There was said to be variability, too, among pupils with regard to expressions of homophobia. The young gay male respondent highlighted that there were a number of lesbian, gay and bisexuals at his school, most noticeably in the sixth form. However, other pupils, more often but not solely in Years 7 to 9, were said to be routinely homophobic. Moreover, a culture of homophobia was said to be growing in the school attended by the young gay man, due to the school, in the last two to three years, having a changing catchment area. Pupils were now said to be drawn from an area with lower socio-economic status and were seen to be generally more disruptive than before. The young man's mother interviewed, confirmed these perceptions. She added that she was concerned about violence against her son and had complained to the school about homophobia but reported that she knew of no action being taken to counter it. The young lesbian interviewed noted the importance of having a lesbian and gay youth group to attend as this provided her with support which the school did not.

While these findings could be viewed as only indicative of the situation in other schools, they nonetheless highlighted what appeared to be three important characteristics related to the temporality, spatiality and sociality of homophobia. That is, homophobia (and the extent of homophobic incidents) could change over time; it occurred in, and was perhaps related to, different physical spaces; and it was differentiated with regard to different groupings of people – with these groupings having their own sets of interests, concerns and positions with regard to same-sex sexualities and homophobia. These sensitising concepts were carried forward into the methodology for the study itself.

Guided discussions with the LGB Centre staff

Guided discussions with *LGB Centre* staff pointed to a number of issues related to religion and ethnicity and school ethos. A family therapist attached to the Centre, for example, highlighted that a family's ethnicity could have an impact on whether they accepted, at least in the shorter term, their gay son. African and African-Caribbean

families were said to be less accepting than White British families, with fathers being less accepting than mothers. This was said to relate to interactions between socio-economic status, cultural beliefs and religious affiliation. Moreover, young lesbians, in her experience, appeared less likely to come out than young gay men – at least while still at school.

Guided discussions with the Centre's Schools and Youth Workers revealed that there was variability among schools with regard to their work on homophobia. A number of schools in the LEA had actively approached the Schools worker requesting either a workshop on homophobia for staff and/or for pupils. *LGB Centre* staff had also approached other schools to offer their services as they were aware of homophobic incidents in them through discussions with lesbian, gay and bisexual young people attending the *Centre's* youth groups. However, they also indicated that there were other schools in which there were problems related to homophobia but which were seen to be too difficult in which to conduct work – at least with regard to facilitating workshops. Before that work could be conducted it was suggested that these schools needed to develop their policies on areas such as bullying in general as well as on equal opportunities.

Taking a reflexive approach

The fairly extensive discussions with *LGB Centre* staff also helped prepare me personally for going into schools and conducting interviews with staff and pupils. Reports of teachers being embarrassed and harassed by pupils when attempting to teach about same-sex sexualities made me nervous about speaking with pupils – especially with boys where homophobia among them is a well documented feature of their life at school (Sharpe & Thomson, 2005) and because I might experience this a threat to my own sense of self as male. One of the *LGB Centre* staff, for example, talked about how he had been harassed by a group of pupils when facilitating a session about homophobia, and was himself angered by stubbornly held views that regard homosexuality (or homosexual acts) as sinful.

Although my interest lay in identifying staff and pupils who were engaged in activities and discussions that challenged homophobia, I was aware of the negative accounts of homophobia and schools – accounts that raised images of suicides, of mental health problems, of physical harm of verbal abuse and of professional careers stalled or compromised through being ‘outed’ as a lesbian or gay man. These thoughts and feelings were not assuaged by having attended meetings or conferences on homophobia and schooling prior to the study itself. Time and time again the harms caused to pupils and staff through homophobic incidents were recalled and made public.

However, knowing and talking informally with lesbian and gay teachers who were currently in schools as well as with members of school senior leadership groups committed to equal opportunities and tackling bullying of any kind, was more reassuring. They spoke of a number of tactics they adopted as part of their professional role. These included, for example, expecting high standards of respect, politeness and courtesy (of pupils to staff *and* of staff to pupils); not referring to one’s personal life; dressing appropriately for a school context; and being focussed on pupils’ interests and needs (on their learning as well as their on their personal and social development) and of knowing other staff members who were lesbian or gay and/or who would not tolerate discrimination on the grounds of sexuality.

With some of these thoughts in mind, I arranged to visit the girls’ school first, believing this to be a less personally threatening setting in which to conduct interviews. In the first group interviewed, pupils stated how much they liked gay men, but then continued by stating how distrustful they were of lesbians. I found that the technique of use here was the same that I had used on a number of occasions when facilitating groupwork on issues about which people have strongly held views. These were: to enquire into the logic of respondents’ accounts; to identify patterns of consistency or points of inconsistency; to summarise what was being said; and to ask all group members to comment on particular points made by one person. In short, to

make the most of the general skills needed by investigators when using a flexible research design to minimise bias: asking questions; listening attentively, being adaptive and flexible and having a good grasp of the issues (Robson, 2002).

Development of interview guides

The study aimed to collect data from pupils (from Years 9 & 10 in each school) and staff (at least one from the senior management team and two others involved in work to address homophobia). With the overall aim of the study and the research questions as a starting point, and using feedback from the preparatory activities, three interview guides were developed: one for a member of the senior management team; one for teachers addressing homophobia in their work; and one for pupils (Appendices 1-3).

Interview guides asked staff to state their area of work, their understanding(s) of homophobia and whether homophobia had affected their school. They were then asked to describe what policies or activities had been carried out in the school to address homophobia and how, if at all, they fitted with other policies and programmes. Respondents were asked to identify what changes, if any, they saw as resulting from the work and what steps they might take in the future to continue to address homophobia

Drawing on the five outcomes association with *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004a) pupils were first asked to identify their views on the school with regard to it being an enjoyable place to be, a safe place and whether they thought they and other pupils were helped to do their best. They were then asked to comment on their understandings and experiences of homophobia and what, if anything had been done in the school to prevent it, what they thought of these actions and whether any next steps should be taken to address homophobia.

The interview guides for staff were piloted with two teachers (one teacher in a case study school, another teacher who worked in another LEA). The interview guides were piloted with two young people (a young man and a young woman in Year 10 not from

a case study school). The teachers stated that a flexible approach would be needed during interviews as topics may not necessarily be addressed in the sequence outlined in the guide. The pupils stated that the questions made sense to them. Neither the teachers nor the pupils thought that the guides should be revised.

Gaining access to schools

As each case study school had been in contact with the *LGB* Centre, the teacher known to the Centre was first approached to ask whether the school would be interested in taking part in the study. The nature and purpose of the study was explained. After each had expressed interest in their school taking part, a summary sheet about the study was sent. This outlined the background to the study, the information to be collected and the issues of consent, confidentiality and anonymity involved in the study. Interview guides were sent to the school.

Permission was then gained by the PSHE lead from senior management to conduct the study and a 'link' teacher in each school identified who could provide liaison within the school, identify relevant members of staff and pupils for interview and who would be first point of contact for the study.

In the coeducational and girls' school, teachers granted permission for pupils to take part in the study. In the boys' school, the link teacher requested that a letter of consent was written for the PSHE teacher to send to parents. This had to be signed by parents prior to boys' being allowed to take part in an interview.¹⁴

¹⁴ I left the decision regarding gaining parental consent with school staff. According to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) parental consent is only needed in research with '... participants whose age, intellectual capability or other vulnerable circumstance may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to undertake their role' (*ibid* p. 7). Issues of gaining voluntary informed consent from the young people involved in the study are addressed below.

Selection of staff and pupils

Interviews took place during the school year, 2005-2006. In the girls' school, interviews with staff and pupils were conducted during one visit in the Autumn Term, 2005. In the boys' school, interviews were first conducted with the Deputy Head and PSHE Coordinator during the Spring Term, 2006 and with the PSHE teacher and pupils in the Summer Term. In the coeducational school, interviews were conducted with a member of the senior management team, two support teachers and pupils during the Summer Term, 2006 (see summary table, below)

Staff interviewed in each school included a member of the senior management team who had overall responsibility for PSHE and/or equal opportunities and/or inclusion and two other members of staff nominated by the school who had a particular interest in and/or responsibility for work to address homophobia and bullying with pupils.

The link teacher was asked to identify groups of pupils who would like to talk about homophobia and homophobic bullying – one group of pupils who might be broadly in favour of the school addressing same-sex sexuality issues and homophobia and another group of pupils who had challenged these issues being addressed by the school (such as using homophobic language or expressing negative views about same-sex sexuality during a lesson). Schools were requested to identify 6-8 pupils for each group, one group drawn from Year 9 and the other from Year 10.

In the Girls school, Year 9 pupils were unavailable during the visit due to their participation in a school event that had been unexpected by the teacher. A group of Year 11 pupils were therefore selected (and who were broadly in favour of addressing homophobia). In the boys' school, the teacher indicated that it was difficult to select groups in this way but that a selection of pupils, some broadly in favour and some broadly against addressing the issues could be included in each group. This, the teacher felt, reflected how PSHE lessons were conducted, demonstrating that boys with differing views were capable of discussing homophobia in a considered and

considerate way. In the coeducational school, the link teacher suggested that single-sex groups of boys and girls be interviewed. The teacher had experience of boys and girls holding somewhat contrasting views about same-sex sexuality and homophobia and suggested that pupils would be more likely to express their views if in single-sex groups. This also reflected this schools' occasional use of single sex lessons for Sex and Relationship Education.

There was a degree of variation in the size of pupil groups. In the girls' school, six pupils made up the group thought to be challenging of the work on homophobia. After the teacher had selected five girls for the other group, four friends of those chosen asked if they too could take part in the interview – the girls being available as the interview was conducted during their lunch break. Because all of these pupils wished their views about homophobia in the school to be heard, it seemed unnecessary, even unethical, to exclude their voices from the study.

A similar situation arose in the boys' school with 10 pupils in Year 9 and 12 pupils in Year 10 asking the PSHE teacher if they could take part in the interviews (the interviews were being conducted during one of their regular PSHE lessons). All of these pupils had obtained written permission from their parents to take part in the group. A few other pupils in each year group in the boys' school asked to be involved in the interview but, as they had not gained written permission from their parents, the teacher did not allow this. In the coeducational school, groups of 6-8 pupils were selected and taken from other lessons to take part in the interview.

The ethnic background of pupils interviewed generally reflected the ethnic composition of pupils at the schools (White UK, Black African, Black Caribbean, and Asian (Chinese). There were, however, just two pupils from Asian (Indian and Pakistani) backgrounds in the groups.

Conducting interviews

At the start of each interview, its purpose was explained. Respondents were informed that they did not have to answer any questions and their oral consent to audio-recording the interview was obtained. It was explained to respondents that, when reported, the data would be anonymised and that their name, or the name of the school, would not be mentioned.

Staff respondents were told, however, that given that only three schools were included in the study, it might be possible for those who knew the school, the setting and the work they had done that it might be possible to identify the school. Despite this, staff appeared keen to highlight the work carried out and only one teacher interviewed expressed concern about being identified.¹⁵

Pupils were informed that the interview was not a test or quiz, but aimed to find out about their views, opinions and understandings about bullying in general and homophobia and homophobic bullying in particular.

Interviews with staff were generally conducted individually (after being interviewed herself, one respondent took me to her line manager who was to be interviewed and then sat in on the interview). Group interviews with pupils were conducted in classrooms with no other pupils present.

Interviews with staff lasted from 25-60 minutes. Interviews with pupils lasted from 25-50 minutes (see summary table, below).

¹⁵ Because of this, the name of the role of the teacher taking part has been changed to anonymise this respondent's contributions.

Summary table: interviews with staff and pupils

| Time of visit | Staff and pupils interviewed | | |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| | Autumn, 2005 | Spring, 2006 | Summer, 2006 |
| Girls' school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Head • PSHCE Coordinator • Student Integration Officer • Pupils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yr10 (N=6) ○ Yr11 (N=9) ○ Total pupils = 15 | | |
| Boys' school | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Head • PSHE Coordinator | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSHE teacher • Pupils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yr9 (N=10) ○ Yr10 (N=12) ○ Total pupils = 22 |
| Coeducational school | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Management Team • Support Teacher • Support Teacher • Pupils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Boys, Yr9 (N=5) ○ Boys, Yr10 (N=5) ○ Girls, Yr9 (N=5) ○ Girls, Yr10 (N= 6) ○ Total pupils = 21 |
| Total staff | 9 | | |
| Total pupils | 58 | | |

Collection of other information

Contextual and background information about each school was collected prior to each visit. Each school's prospectus and policies (where available) were read to identify the general characteristics of the school and any specialist areas. In addition, the latest Ofsted report for each school was read to identify particular strengths and areas for development.

While travelling to the school and on arriving at it, brief notes were made about the physical characteristics of the school, the friendliness and helpfulness of pupils when asking for directions and immediate feelings about the school's ethos. During the visit itself, brief notes were made of any posters or displays on show that addressed bullying, harassment or related issues (such as equal opportunities).

Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and were analysed by means of 'successive approximation' (Neuman, 2006). Using successive approximation 'A researcher begins with research questions and a framework of assumptions and concepts. He or she then probes into the data, asking questions of the evidence to see how well the concepts fit the evidence and reveal features of the data (*ibid* p. 469). New concepts are created by abstracting from the evidence and tested against the data. The strategy is termed successive approximation 'because the modified concepts and the model approximate the full evidence and are modified over and over to become successively more accurate' (*ibid* p.469) or aligned with the data.

This technique involved repeated readings of the transcripts to identify key themes that related to the research questions in order to identify unanticipated themes or issues and to identify gaps. The purpose of the analysis was to identify a series of themes that highlighted the main features of respondents' accounts within and across the case studies, while not privileging one or another factor (such as the role of policies or CPD in addressing homophobia).

The particular analytic framework I had in mind was drawn from the research questions and a realist (or interdependently layered) understanding of each case). The first set of themes I identified were those with which I was familiar from Layder's research map and the themes which formed the backbone of the National Healthy Schools Programme. These related to structural factors (such as gender); organisational factors (such as policy development and CPD); and some situated and individual factors (such as individuals' positive or negative views regarding same-sex sexualities). A list of preliminary themes was prepared which included: the direction given by senior managers to this area of work; the existing school ethos as a context for work on homophobia, the need for CPD about homophobia, the ability of pupils to talk about homophobia and pupils' general appreciation of their school as a safe place to be.

Transcripts were subsequently read and re-read to identify, first, whether themes still appeared grounded in respondents' accounts; second, whether there were issues and topics that themes did not address; and third, what new themes were needed. A revised set of themes was written up which included: the priority given by teachers to promoting discussion and debate among pupils, the priority given at the boys' school to promote different forms of personal expression, the reported differences among teachers with regard to their views about same-sex sexuality and preventing homophobia, the range of activities carried out by teachers to counter homophobia, the concern among pupils of being thought to be lesbian or gay themselves, the sense among pupils about the need to promote fairness and tolerance, the links made by staff and pupils between countering homophobia alongside other forms of prejudice (such as that associated with ethnicity, gender and disability), the importance expressed by staff particularly (but also mentioned by some pupils) of being at a school in which there was a culture of inclusivity.

Two presentations on emerging findings were subsequently made to audiences knowledgeable about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues. The first was to an academic

audience in a higher education setting. The second was to members of the *LGB Centre*.

Participants at both of these meetings were interested to learn that schools were carrying out work to address homophobia – and which appeared, to some extent at least, to be informing young people's views. Many of those in the academic audience were surprised that work of this kind was taking place at all, the popular view being, a number said, that schools were uniformly and routinely homophobic. Participants at the *LGB Centre* meeting were less surprised to hear about the extent of the work in schools, but were pleased to learn about the views of pupils.

In addition, *LGB Centre* participants suggested that there might be a number of other issues to consider for further analysis. These included: the relationship between religious beliefs and homophobia; whether pupils mentioned that the popular media informed their views, and whether work to address homophobia was the particular remit of lesbian and gay teachers.

Making presentations of emerging findings was useful methodologically for three reasons. First, it confirmed that the knowledge generated was generally new to audiences and highlighted that work to address homophobia in schools was underway and appeared to be having some impact on pupils. Second, it enabled me to begin to organise the data into a series of themes (that reflected the layered nature of life in schools) and to begin to construct an argument that made sense to others about the ways that homophobia was addressed in schools. Third, it enabled me to identify whether there was missing or negative evidence that I had overlooked (Neuman, 2006) (such as questions about whether it was lesbian and gay teachers who led on work in schools to address homophobia).

Using feedback from the meetings, the transcripts were read for a further time to check for new themes. These are those present in the final analysis.

Establishing trustworthiness

Although concepts of 'reliability' and 'validity', as defined in positivist approaches to research, can be problematic when applied to flexible case study designs in which qualitative information is collected, the underlying idea of producing credible, insightful and contextually relevant research findings remains important (Robson, 2002).

In this study, a number of steps were taken to reduce bias and threats to validity. These included: developing an overall design for the study with a clear set of research questions; audio-recording interviews to have an accurate record of respondents' accounts; making notes of visits to each of the schools; using techniques during interviews to minimise bias (such as good listening, flexibility when asking questions, summarising and checking with respondents what has been said); having an analytic procedure (successive approximation); having an analytic framework (informed by the research questions and realist principles); identifying and clarifying themes within and across interviews and creating preliminary and subsequent of findings and testing these out with practitioner/community and academic audiences.

Ethical considerations

In line with the British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Education Research (2004) a number of ethical principles guided the study.¹⁶

Operating with an ethic of respect for the views of participants

In this study, I was flexible with regard to dates and times for contact and meeting staff – not only with regard to explaining the purpose of the study, but also for conducting interviews with staff and pupils.

In addition, and prior to contact with each school, I learned about each school through its website and latest Ofsted report (and identified, in particular, the strengths of each

¹⁶ See: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICA1.PDF> Accessed 21 May, 2007

school). From staff at the LGB Centre, I learned what sorts of activities to counter homophobia had taken place in each school and what challenges were perceived to remain to carry this work forward.

I was aware from preparatory activities that some pupils had questioned the teaching on same-sex sexual relationships. During interviews with pupils I sought to encourage a range of views to be expressed (for example, by stating that some people held negative opinions of same-sex relationships and asking pupils to comment on this).

Voluntary informed consent and the right to withdraw from the study

Discussions were held with each school about the purpose and nature of the study. Although my first contact with member of staff was not necessarily a member of the senior management, I requested that consent be gained from senior management for the study to take place in the school. Verbal discussions were followed up with written information about the study.

After gaining consent at the school level, the purpose of the study was explained prior to individual interviews to gain the consent of respondents. Permission was sought to audio-record each interview. This was readily agreed by staff. One group of pupils expressed concern about the audio-recording. On discussion, this related to their anxieties that the recording would be played back during the interview and they did not wish to hear their own voices. I assured them that this would not happen and said that the interview could progress without them being recorded. With that assurance, they agreed to a recording being made.

At the start of each interview I also explained that the interview was not a test or exam but about their own thoughts and opinions. I also explained that I was not interested in their own personal sexualities but about their views about homophobia and homophobic bullying. During one interview at the girls' school, and where it appeared that one or two pupils were encouraging another to talk about her sexuality

(which appeared to make that pupil uncomfortable) I reiterated that I was not interested in pupils' own sexuality.

Respondents were also informed that they had a right not to participate in the study. For each school, this meant that it could withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. For individual respondents, they had the right not to comment on or respond to any question. Although not all individual pupils spoke during interviews, no-one withdrew from the study.

It was agreed with the *LGB Centre* and with schools that findings would be fed back to them - emerging findings via the presentation at the *LGB Centre* and final findings provided to the link teacher in each school (with the option of information to pupils).

Privacy

Respondents were informed that data would be treated confidentially – I would be the only person listening to the audio-recordings of pupils. A transcriber and I would be the only people listening to audio-recordings of staff interviews.

It was explained to respondents that, when reported, findings would be anonymised so that individuals and especially individual pupils, could not be identified. For staff interviews, it was explained that, while the name of the school would not be used when findings were reported, with background information about the school being provided, a reader might be able to identify the school and certain staff members. Respondents were asked to provide their views in the light of this.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, all personal data was used for the purposes of the study only, was kept securely and anonymised as far as possible (in that interview transcript headings and names of files did not contain the names of schools or individuals).¹⁷

¹⁷ See: Data Protection Act 1998: A Guide for Institute of Education Staff:
<http://k1.ioe.ac.uk/calendar/policies/DataProtection/DataProtection.pdf> Accessed 22 May, 2007

Chapter 4 – Findings

In this section, findings from interviews about homophobia and bullying in each of the case study schools are presented alongside other forms of complementary and supportive evidence. Each section draws first on information from the school's Ofsted report – the latest available prior to interviews being conducted – to provide information on the characteristics of the school and its particular strengths. Following this, findings from respondents are described – first, the views of staff, and then the views of pupils. Finally, a synthesis of these perspectives is offered for each school which summarises the key actions taken in relation to homophobia and bullying and the issues this raised for respondents.

The Co-Educational School

This co-educational school, located in South East London, was reported by Ofsted (2002) to be larger than average with around 1,500 pupils on roll.¹⁸ A little under two thirds of pupils were White British and the proportion of minority ethnic pupils at the school was comparatively low for inner London. Minority ethnic pupils include those who were Black African, Black Caribbean and Asian or Asian-British (including Indian and 'other Asian backgrounds'). Thirty two per cent of pupils were reported to be eligible for free school meals (the national average for secondary schools being around 13-15% (LACA, 2007)). Thirty seven per cent of pupils were reported to have special educational needs, a figure said to be 'high' when compared against national standards (p.5).¹⁹

The school was judged by Ofsted (2002) to be 'very effective', with 'very high' 'standards of teaching, learning, leadership and management' (p.5). School leadership

¹⁸ So that schools are not identified, their Ofsted reports are not included in the references section.

¹⁹ The national average for pupils with Special Educational Needs, with statements, is reported to be between 2-3%. See: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/inyourarea/natsumm.shtml> Accessed 6th October, 2007.

was reported to have helped create a school that was 'outstanding for the open, welcoming and secure environment it provides, the quality of relationships at all levels, the equality of opportunity offered and the very high quality support for students' personal and social development, as well as for their academic success' (p.18).

However, the quality of the physical environment was said to require improvement. There was reported to be overcrowding in most teaching areas (with some small classes being taught in corridors), flat roofs that let in rain and poor specialist accommodation (such as that for art and design).

With regard to pupils' behaviour in and out of classrooms, no incidents of 'oppressive behaviour' were reported and bullying was not seen to be an issue (p.6). Parents were said to be pleased that pupils' felt safe in the school and considered bullying to be rare.

There was reported to be 'good' provision for pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils were given '...many opportunities to explore other values and belief systems. The school promotes a strong moral code and its own values are very clear' (p.7). PSE was taught once a fortnight through tutorial periods and covered sex and relationships, drugs education and healthy living.

Pupils' personal and social development was assessed with the assistance of trained and experienced counsellors. This informed the ways in which tutors, and pupils themselves, planned how best to meet their educational and personal needs. Some 'disaffected' pupils were trained to work as 'tutors' in local primary schools. Pupils with behavioural difficulties were reported to be offered a 'great deal of very effective support' (p.17).

The school was seen to have a 'very strong' emphasis on inclusion. There were key policy documents that addressed equal opportunities (including sex and race), with these policies being informed by pupils' views. The school's 'strong commitment' to

inclusion was reported to be 'evident in the outstanding way that [students with special educational needs] are assimilated into its everyday life and work (p.17)

Staff perspectives

Three staff were interviewed individually: one member of the senior management team (SMT) and two teachers, one of whom had particular responsibility to develop and promote anti-bullying activities (T1). The third member of staff (T2) asked to be interviewed on learning that a study on homophobia and bullying was being conducted in the school.

Equal opportunities and staff training

Respondents highlighted a number of ways in which homophobic bullying was addressed in the school. First, this form of bullying had been raised as a problem to be addressed by the Equal Opportunity Working Group. Following this, external visitors had been invited into the school to assist with the development and implementation of professional development activities.

It came up about five or six years ago, and the Equal Opps. Group had a considerable concern about homophobia and we decided to start with staff. So we devised a staff meeting in which we, I think we got a theatre company or the local LGB Centre in to help us plan it and we had a series of scenarios around, you know a child comes to you, their saying they're being bullied this that and the other specifically focussed on homophobia, and we found as well that lots of people were unclear about the Section, Clause 28 and had a lot of misinformation (CoEd, SMT).

One respondent also highlighted the role of the Equal Opportunities in highlighting the need to counter homophobic bullying. Work on homophobia was said to be part of an overall commitment to building a caring and supportive school ethos.

The Working Parties are the driving force. They are fully committed to driving out bullying and homophobic behaviour. They're not just doing it to tick some boxes so the school gets a good Ofsted, it's passion, extremely passionate and we're a very caring and passionate workforce here (...) There's always

something being revisited and revamped and I think the homophobic stuff came from the Equal Ops Working Party (...) The policy against bullying, it included homophobic bullying, it was revisited and rewritten and that was launched at a staff meeting. Basically we said as teachers, 'We're not going to tolerate, we will challenge and do it together collectively, we'll challenge and set guidelines we've drawn up (T1, CoEd).

An explicit link was made to the priority this same school gave to tackling racism, although it was noted that addressing homophobia presented its own challenges among staff.

There is no way in this school that casual racist name calling would be unchallenged, everyone would challenge that. I think there's quite a lot of perplexity with staff about the use of the word 'gay'. Some of the 'batty boy' language will be kind of exchanged within groups of boys going down a corridor and I think people don't see that in the same way, or see that they ought to intervene in the same way as they do with racist language (...) There's no way you'd let a group of students use racist language in that way. It's partly the fact that they're not in a lesson, within your usual kind of situation (CoEd, SMT).

Working with pupils

There was said to be a 'sequence of three things' carried out by staff to address homophobia across the school with pupils. First, students were introduced to ideas related to homophobia through a play presented during an assembly. The play drew on a film that portrayed a same-sex relationship between two young men in a working class area of south east London as well as on the murder of a young Nigerian boy in south east London.

I think it was a sequence of about three things highlighting the issue of homophobes. So many kids didn't know what it was, we did whole school assemblies and the kids wrote it, you know using extracts from, you know, the play, in Thamesmead, Beautiful Thing (...) the opening where they take his bag and they're throwing it around and it's really ugly name calling, (...) and it was about the same time as Damilola was murdered. And I remember reading it

actually, he hadn't been racist name called, he'd got an awful lot of homophobic name calling simply because he was a new child. So we intercut scenes of that with kind of Damilola ringing his Dad and saying 'What's gay mean?' And so basically crossing as far as we could as well, you know to the issues of race as well (CoEd, SMT).

To complement this work, students, some of whom were reported to be gay, were involved in developing a leaflet and contributing to assemblies. This work, it was felt, was contributing to a change in the school with regard to making more visible issues of same-sex sexuality and homophobia.

(...) then the school council at that point did a leaflet on tackling homophobia (...) And some gay students own writing and some six formers did some assemblies in which they kind of came out (...) and that was from about 5 years ago and we felt that we were beginning to make some kind of in-roads (CoEd, SMT).

After perceiving that some progress had been made in countering homophobia, staff then turned their attention to other forms of bullying, in particular, involving the school in the 'Beat Bullying' campaign – where every student had the opportunity to wear a blue wristband to demonstrate their commitment against bullying. However, without a specific focus on homophobia, staff found that the earlier progress made was somewhat eroded.

We turned to other areas of bullying. And then, over the last year, it's back with a vengeance and again it was the casual persistent relentless name calling, day in day out that concerned us, so we thought back to, you know tackling it as a whole school (CoEd, SMT).

Challenging language

Staff respondents spoke of the ways that staff appeared uncertain as to the best ways to challenge homophobic language. Indeed, part of the issue was whether a particular use of words should be viewed as prejudiced.

Chris Moyles on Radio 1 used [the word 'gay' on his show. There was an uproar about BBC presenters and his argument was that he wasn't using it in an offensive way, apparently 'gay' can mean ugly now, which is still in my opinion not right (...)] But the word is changing, again, you know the main cuss a couple of years ago, it was your Mum, that was the cuss, your Mum, if someone said your Mum to you then that was enough to start a fight, But groups of friends started to joke with it and use it amongst themselves. It's interesting (CoEd, T1).

Parallels were drawn between the uses of potentially homophobic language and that which might be racist.

Referring to Black students, I've heard them call each other nigger and if that was offensive to another group of students is it still okay for them to use that word? I think there are obviously some words that are generally agreed as being offensive. And I think if anyone in the classroom including the teacher is offended by a certain word then it should be okay to challenge it (CoEd, T1).

Two respondents suggested that, rather than preventing students from using certain words or phrases, efforts should be made to encourage them to think about what they said, why they said it, and what effects it might have on others. One respondent noted that students were already aware of and the fact that the same words could be used in friendly or antagonistic ways.

I think in some PSHCE lessons there is not enough discussion about these things, not in enough detail in my view, but there are time constraints. For students I think it's either 'Yeah, it is offensive, I meant to be offensive' or 'No, I'm talking to my mates, Sir, it doesn't matter.' I don't think they're fully aware of the complexities. They do know how to use words offensively, they can switch like that, if they want to be offensive then they'll use it. They're definitely aware of the two different instances (CoEd, T1)

I can imagine people taking the word 'gay' and jazzing it up and using it in a different and in a way that's good. What does gay mean anyway? (...) what's more interesting is *why* they've said it, the origins of it, their own fear, the

individual fear about themselves that's made them use that language in that way (CoEd, T2)

Staff attitudes

One respondent recognised that good progress had been made in integrating issues regarding homophobia into the school curriculum. However, there were also concerns about relevant teaching skills when teaching about this issue.

The good points is that it is now actively part of the curriculum but I can't say much about how it's delivered, or the quality of what is delivered because there's so many different teachers teaching it. Some of those teachers are weak but some of them are very good as well (CoEd, T2).

In part, this weakness was said to relate to the presence of 'homophobia' among some of the staff at the school.

There were two incidents, one of which happened about four years ago, which was really, really striking because it involved a Muslim member of staff who is a homophobe and didn't think anything to do with homosexuality should be taught (...) Another one is, unfortunately this sounds as though I'm Bible bashing, or religious people bashing, but the other one is a devout Christian who is also a homophobe, who in a meeting recently, when we were discussing one of our children who I felt was being bullied because he displayed homosexual tendencies, wanted the other children reminded that homosexuality is a phase that people go through. I was so shocked that I had nothing to say (CoEd, T2).

Visibility

Although students who were 'out' as lesbian or gay had been involved in assemblies four to five years ago, respondents did not mention there to be any students who were currently 'out' (although, as reported below, some pupils did talk of lesbian and gay pupils they currently knew). However, one respondent had noticed that some students had been questioned by others about being gay, or occasionally teased.

However, support was offered by staff and those students who had been teased were now believed to be more comfortable in the school.

No student has personally come out to me. We've got an issue going on at the moment, one of our deaf students, he's had some teasing by some of the other deaf students who've said that he's gay. He hasn't said that he's being bullied. But they've kind of noticed things and they've said, 'Are you gay?' And they've asked him outright and I think he's having a bit of a tough time of it at the moment (...) A couple of members of staff have said, 'Look, any time you want to talk about anything, just come and see me.' (...) But no-one has actually come up to me and said 'I'm gay' (CoEd, T1).

One respondent questioned the extent to which students could be open about their sexuality if staff themselves were not open about theirs.

I think until the staff come out the kids ain't going to come out, or the kids come out within the context of very small groups or with the counselling service (CoEd, T1)

However, it was also recognised that 'coming out' could be difficult for a member of staff.

But I'm sure it would stir up things up for a teacher to come out. I just don't know how that could or should be taken forward. I think it's wrong to say people *should* come out. I'd argue against that (CoEd, T2).

Next steps

Although one respondent was concerned that staff should not have to 'come out' and be more visible individually as lesbian or gay, it was suggested that the issue of homophobia should have greater recognition across the school. In particular, external sources of support should be publicised and made known to students who, it was argued, had a right to know about services and information what might contribute to their well-being.

What needs to happen here? Visibility I suppose. There needs to be more visibility of the issue, not necessarily of the individual people or the students, but more visibility of what is available to lesbian and gay students in the Borough (...) Do the kids know that's available? It's their right to know it, as a gay or lesbian teenager it's their right to know what's available for them (CoEd, T2).

Another respondent stated that there had been some success arising from the work over the last four to five years to address homophobia. Yet, much more needed to be done. Not all staff, for example, appeared to take action when encountering homophobia among pupils.

And staff will often come to me and say, 'I've had such and such an incident.' They still don't see it as their brief to tackle it and they will come and report it to me and say 'I've had two boys who've been saying this or that.' And I think, 'It's just a normal infringement of school policy, you just deal with it.' And that was the point of what I was trying to say, it's got to be embedded in the kind of day-to-day life of the school (CoEd, SMT).

One answer to this was said to be to need to continue to learn from staff about their strengths and professional development needs with regard to homophobia. Providing somewhat rigid directions to professional practice was not seen to be as useful as providing opportunities to extend relevant skills and confidence.

I think one important step is to find out from both staff and pupils where they are at the moment. And, if they're feeling unconfident or unskilled in certain areas you tackle that. You know, I remember 20, 30 years ago with anti-racism going in really heavily and punitively. I'm now much more, 'Find out where people are at the moment and work to support them at that level.' The top down directives simply don't work and quite often people don't act because they don't know how, or they don't feel empowered and it's pointless being angry (CoEd, SMT)

Pupils' perspectives

Twenty-one pupils took part in four group interviews: one group of five girls from Year 9 and one group of six girls from Year 10, and two groups of five boys from Years 9 and 10.

Bullying and teasing

Pupils had a number of views regarding the meanings homophobia and homophobic bullying. One group of boys highlighted ideas related to discrimination and difference.

- R Let's move onto homophobia. What does it mean?²⁰
P3 It means hatred of homosexuals
P4 No, anti-gay
P5 Cussing someone 'cos they are gay. Just saying they're gay, using it as an insult
P4 It's used for someone who's different
P3 A lot of people think that gay people are different to you
P4 And that it's bad to be gay
(CoEd, Yr9, boys)

For the following group of girls, there was at first uncertainty about the difference between homophobia and homosexual, but respondents then clarified their understanding when talking about bullying.

- R I want to ask about homophobia now. What do you understand it to be?
P1 The first thing that comes into my head is 'gay'
P2 Gay boys not lesbians
P3 No if you say 'homophobic' I just think boys
P2 Yeah, same here
R So what does 'homophobic bullying' mean to you?
P1 They're picking on them for what they are
P Or lying about them and saying they're a lesbian when they're not
(CoEd, Yr9, girls)

²⁰ 'R' indicates my own input as researcher.

They then went on to make a distinction between things being said in a hurtful way and things said in a friendlier way

- P1 'You're gay', that's what people normally say
P3 That's if you're a bit odd if you walk a bit different
P4 I think people say that but they don't take it offensively they just say 'Oh shut up' and it's about mucking about
R You'd use that among friends?
P4 I use it when I'm mucking about with someone
(CoEd, Yr9, girls)

A group of Year 9 boys also drew a distinction between bullying and using words related to being lesbian or gay in a friendlier way, albeit still connoting something negative.

- P2 Yeah. They go, 'Oh do you want to come here after school' and you go 'No' then they say, 'You gay'
P4 It's turned into like an insult
P2 Yeah, if you're annoying
P4 Cos I'm an idiot then you call me 'gay' or something like that
P1 If it takes too long to get somewhere, then that's gay
(CoEd, Yr9, boys)

The rest of this same group had not noticed bullying in school, whether of a general nature or associated with racism or homophobia.

- R Have you seen or come across different sorts of bullying, like racist bullying?
P2 I ain't never heard of that or seen that in this school
R What about the use of words like gay?
P1 I've never known someone to be bullied for being gay
(CoEd, Yr10, boys)

Some pupils indicated that teasing about being a lesbian did take place in school, even if respondents themselves would not take part in this. The reason given, rather than directly being related to homophobia, was thought to be more due to the entertainment value, or the status attached to making another student cry. However,

respondents also thought that one of the best ways to address this was for those being teased to show that they were not bothered by homophobic insults.

- P2 I think sometimes if someone is called a lesbian and they react and say 'I'm not like this or that' and they might start saying 'Oh I don't like lesbians'. I think that name calling has a really big impact on what people think about stuff.
- P4 But people look for weak spots in people and if someone reacts to it badly then they're going to carry on because it's, like, entertainment.
- R So if a girl is called a lesbian and she says 'So what'?
- P3 Then they're not going to get a reaction, so what's the point in doing it?
- P2 If a girl starts crying and all that and they can see that then they've hit her emotionally then they will carry on doing it.
- R Why should people do that?
- P4 It's just the way it is
- P3 It's entertainment. It's something to be proud of and all if you go home and say to your mates 'Oh I've made a girl cry at school today' it may make you look more harder and popular. Among your peers.
- R Is that something any of you would do?
- P(all) No. No.
- (CoEd, Yr10, girls)

The reasons for the general lack of bullying in the school, about homophobia or about anything else, were put down to a number of factors. One reason was that teachers were seen not to tolerate it and took action quickly to prevent and stop it. Another reason, shared by Year 10 respondents, was that, by Year 10, students had matured and were less likely to bully.

- P1 You never really see people out in the break getting bullied, you don't hear about anything like that
- P3 You got scolded straight away if you were caught getting bullied.
- P2 I think people are more mature and don't get bullied but in yr 7 people might get more bullied, but now people are more mature.
- (CoEd, Yr10, boys)

- P4 Now we're in Year 10 we're more mature because we got our GCSEs coming up as well I think you tend to settle in and you know behaviour wise what's right and what's wrong. Whereas year 7 they just tend to compete against each other and want to entertain everyone and find out who's hardest and who's not.

(CoEd, Yr10, girls)

The group of Year 10 girls made particular reference to feeling that the school was a safe and enjoyable place to be – and one which strove for inclusivity.

- P5 I still think that [name of school] is more settled than other schools.
R Here you feel quite safe?
P yeah <general agreement>
R Do you enjoy coming here?
P Yeah <two girls>
P2 Cos everyone tends to, not like other schools, but everyone tends to stick up for each other here (...) I don't know we tend to stick by each other more
P4 I think this school has got more mature, this school has got a different variety of people with different disabilities and that
P <other girls saying 'Yes'>
P And they don't get bullied 'cos they're different from other people and you've got facilities like special needs downstairs and the school's good like that.

(CoEd, Yr10, girls)

Diversity and inclusion was seen to be a strength of the school among another group of pupils, this time boys.

- R What are the good things about the school?
P4 People work together, but the building, it's falling down
P2 It's held together with chewing gum
P3 The building's crap but the people in it are good
P1 Not all them, there are some gaps
P2 There's a strong diversity
P3 And a good mix of people
P2 Yeah.

(CoEd, Boys, Yr9)

Visibility

Some reference was made to the visibility of lesbian and gay pupils in the school. Some pupils were aware of a number of students being 'out', although this information was not uniformly known.

R Are there are any lesbian or gay students in the school?
P4 Oh there are lots
Pall Yeah, yes
P3 Mostly the grungies
R I don't know what that means
P3 [name of girl]
P1 I didn't know she was a lesbian
P3 She was a bisexual lesbian
P4 Yeah. Some girl in our class
P3 She used to be straight though.
(CoEd, Yr 9, girls)

Respondents in a group of Year 9 boys said that they had little knowledge of lesbian or gay students. Indeed, and despite one gay student being known about by a pupil, the school was not seen to be a particularly supportive place for lesbian or gay students.

R What about the ways a lesbian or gay student in the school would feel, do you think they would feel ok about being in the school?
P4 I think they'd be quite scared to come out
P5 I know a gay person in this school and he's ok about it
P1 You don't really see it in this school
P4 People are scared of becoming gay because people see it as an insult and then when they think they might be gay then they're scared of it and try and get away from it 'cos they're so used to it being an insult.
(CoEd, Yr10, boys)

However, a respondent in a group of Year 10 girls felt there to some evidence that homophobic bullying was not a problem in the school as she knew of a few gay and lesbian students.

P2 There's not really homophobic bullying in this school. I think that the people here who are gay and lesbians are really comfortable with themselves I don't think none of them get picked on. If they weren't comfortable then they wouldn't be doing what they're doing and come out.
(CoEd, Yr10, girls)

Learning about homophobia

Respondents differed in their perspectives on what had taken place in the school to help pupils learn about homophobia or, more generally, about issues related to same-sex relationships.

One group of girls stated that they had 'not done anything' on homophobic bullying during lessons, or on homophobia although they had addressed bullying in general and were aware of 'bullying mentors' in the school who they could speak with if needed. With regard to PSHE, they stated that they 'had done nothing' on lesbian and gay issues and that, during PSHE classes, 'It all comes down to drugs, everything leads to drugs in PSHE'.

One respondent in another group of girls stated that she had learned about homophobia,

P2 Mainly in RE (where) we've watched Philadelphia, that film, it's about a gay man who has AIDS and the discrimination he has, and they fired him because of it.

(CoEd, Yr10, girls)

The media, usually television, had provided respondents with opportunities to view gay men and, more rarely, lesbians. In one group of girls, respondents spoke about the unfairness with which Will Young was treated once he had 'come out' as gay.

More usually, respondents indicated that they had learned about gay men and lesbians from personal contact with friends, family members, or friends of family members. Two respondents in one group of Year 10 boys stated that their parents were generally accepting of lesbians and gay men and that 'It's their life, so let them get on with it.' Nonetheless, they did add,

P3 I don't mind it as long as they don't do it in front of me.

P4 I don't care. As long as it doesn't happen with me then it's all good.

(CoEd, Yr10, boys)

At least one or two respondents in every group indicated that they had personal contact with lesbians or gay men. Although respondents in one group of boys indicated that their views had been influenced by activities carried out in the school, greater reference was made to personal contacts made out of school.

- R The work that's done in the school on homophobia, has it made a difference, to you? Is it due to the school or things outside of the school?
- P4 Both.
- P5 It's 'cos we're sensible
- P1 We understand it
- P4 I've known people and experienced people who are gay and knowing what they're like
- P5 My uncle's gay and he's getting married soon and I'm going to go to the wedding and it's going to be cool
- P2 My cousin's gay
- P4 My uncle too
- R Do you *all* know gay people?
- P(all) Yeah, yeah
- P4 My sister goes to a club with all of her gay friends every few weeks and she really enjoys it. They're really nice people and I can sit down and talk to them. She goes there all the time and then they come around they're really nice people and there's nothing wrong with them.
- P5 People that I know, women, interact better with gay men than with lesbians. Like my Mum, she's friends with gay people - they talk like the same language, clothes and stuff
- P1 My great, great Aunt lives in America and she's friends with lots of gay people and they live in Salt Lake City which is like the Mormon part and they get a lot of abuse shouted at them and things for being gay, because the Mormons are so anti-gay.
- (CoEd, Yr9, boys)

Religion and homophobia

When asked about the sorts of people who might not come out as lesbian or gay or who might not share their views about the need to address homophobia, respondents often suggested that there were cultural and religious factors at play. With regard to religion, Islam and Christianity were most often discussed.

- P2 Someone who's beliefs go against it, like Muslim beliefs or things like that
- P4 Like Christians (...)
- P1 'Cos my Uncle is gay and my Grandma who is his Mum is Christian and doesn't like accept him and she doesn't want to meet with his partner or anything. So it's, like, tough for him and stuff.
- (CoEd, Yr9, boys)

In another group, respondents also highlighted the role of culture and religion, yet felt that a more secular and perhaps individualistic approach should be taken with regard to adopting a particular sexual identity.

- P3 I don't really see many Asian gays, more white people are like that, not being racist or anything but I think it's because of their culture and everything they can't do that it's against their religion
- P2 It's mainly white people that you see. I think it's because there ain't much shame against it, no one takes it as a punishment to be gay in this country. Whereas other cultures, they probably take it more seriously, it's shame on Allah and things like that if you're lesbian or gay
- R What do you think of that?
- P4 I think it should be a choice, 'cos there isn't anything in the religion that says 'you should be against this'.
- (CoEd, Yr9, girls)

Next steps

When asked about what else the school might do to address homophobia, respondents had little to say. As they understood the school to be generally a safe place with little or no bullying, homophobic or otherwise, they had few specific suggestions about what else could be done. Respondents in one group of Year 9 boys, however, suggested that talking about homophobia should be introduced sooner, 'from when they're young', before children started using terms as insults.

There was some discussion in this group and one other regarding the value of addressing issues during an assembly. A respondent in one group suggested

- P2 Yeah, they should do an assembly or something where you just get to meet a gay person and then people can see like that gay people are not

from another planet but they're exactly the same as everyone else, you know, it's like they've got different personalities and they, you know, different dress sense and stuff like that, they're just normal people they're just like everyone else.

(CoEd, Yr9, boys)

When asked about this, respondents in a group of Year 10 boys felt that this would single out one person, especially if she or he were a lesbian or gay student.

Even among respondents who had made this suggestion, there was some concern about their own ability to be seen to have an open mind about homophobia and lesbian and gay issues in front of the whole school. While holding progressive views about same-sex sexuality was one thing among friends, it was said to be quite another matter during an assembly.

P1 But I think you need to be very careful 'cos if you do it in a big group like assembly then, when you have mates around you, you act differently don't you?

P2 Yeah

P1 So they might try and be big, kind of

R You have been quite open minded you guys, you seem quite open minded have you felt pressure to be less open minded by people around you?

P1 If I was in front of a whole assembly I wouldn't be on the side of them

P4 I would in front of a lot of people but not assembly.

(CoEd, Yr10, boys)

Summary

Some staff in the coeducational school had responded to homophobia by ensuring that it was one issue among a number which was included through the equal opportunities policy. Some professional development activities on homophobia had been conducted among staff, although there were reported to be some staff who continued to hold prejudice views with regard to same-sex sexualities – progress was somewhat uneven. Pupils were generally against homophobic bullying. Although some activities in the school had addressed homophobia, pupils often stated that they

personally knew gay men and occasionally lesbians. The inclusive culture of the school was reported to be one of the main reasons that bullying was perceived to be low.

The Girls' School

This girls' school, located in South East London, was reported to be of average size with a little over 900 pupils on roll. In general, pupils were from low socio-economic backgrounds and with about half from ethnic minority groups, including Black African, Black Caribbean and Turkish/Turkish Cypriot. Thirty one per cent of pupils were reported to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is around the national average.

The school was judged by Ofsted (2003) to be 'good overall' with some features that were 'very good'. The school was considered to provide a 'safe and civilised place for all pupils to learn and develop' where pupils were looked after and cared for. It was said to provide 'very good' and sometimes 'excellent' Citizenship and Personal and Social Education, and to offer 'very good' opportunities for pupils to develop morally and culturally.

Across the curriculum, pupils were said to be good at using oral skills. Through debates in Citizenship, for example, pupils were encouraged to express their feelings about a wide range of moral and social issues.

The school was judged to have a 'strong commitment to equal opportunities for all' (p.23), especially with regard to pupils from minority ethnic groups or with special educational needs. In Citizenship, pupils learned about their rights and responsibilities. Sex education was effectively addressed during PSHE. During Sociology classes there was 'lively debate' on what constituted a 'family' and pupils were reported to be very tolerant of 'groups in society'.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was said to be outstanding. Through tutorials, assemblies and a 'stimulating display' of posters, most pupils understood there to be zero tolerance of swearing and bullying. The school's pupils' forum influenced aspects of the running of the school. Pupils, for example, identified ways of addressing 'cyber-bullying' (which can take place via text and video messaging, chatrooms and instant messaging, by email, and via websites). If bullying occurs, pupils were judged to know to whom incidents should be reported and, when brought to the notice of staff, bullying was addressed 'swiftly and effectively' (p.20).²¹

Staff perspectives

Three staff were interviewed: one member of the senior management team (SMT), the PSHE coordinator (PSHE Coord), and the Student Integration Officer (Int Off).

Equal opportunities, PSHE and Citizenship

In addressing homophobia, respondents noted the central place of two key aspects of the school, equal opportunities and the PSHE and Citizenship. With regard to equal opportunities, specific efforts had been made to recognise the importance of homophobia by including it in policy documents. It was stated that, following the Stephen Lawrence enquiry, much useful attention had been paid to addressing racism. Homophobia was said to 'lag behind' anti-sexism and anti-racism, the latter being highlighted across the borough as being particular importance.

Equal opportunities should be addressed in schools and I think that homophobia is one that is often left out. Because people are frightened of tackling it and don't know how to tackle it. It's not because they would necessarily be homophobic themselves but they're just panicking about it. [Name of borough] has a very strict route, monitoring of racism, as far as I

²¹ In the latest Inspection Report (published after fieldwork had in the school had taken place), the school was again judged to be 'good' overall (Ofsted, 2006). Strengths of the school included its overall effectiveness; the personal development and well-being of pupils; the provision of care, guidance and support to pupils; and the school's leadership and management.

know they don't monitor any other equal opps in the same way, so I do my own monitoring (GS, SMT).

The emphasis placed on equal opportunities was recognised as a key characteristic of the school by other staff members, including the following respondent who was not part of the senior management team.

I think the leadership of the school is very focussed on equal opportunities and we don't just pick one thing out, but we have a holistic approach, it all comes under the same umbrella (GS, Int Off).

One respondent stated that some parents might be resistant to addressing homophobia in the school – this resistance being seen to be one aspect of the 'White working class culture' of some pupils and their parents. However, this same respondent stated that homophobia was explicitly mentioned in the school literature and that staff would stand firm on upholding the principles of equal opportunities for all. Indeed, given this, it would be up to parents to decide whether to send their daughter to the school.

I think for the balance you need to strike is to give it the same kind of level of support and value as you would for racism or sexism in a mixed school, you've got to make it clear to the parents that this is our policy, so our parents have all had at some point a copy of the equal opportunities policy and it's clearly in students contact books as well. And if they do not agree with their policy then they shouldn't be sending their child to this school. And if there is an issue and their child is dealt with because they've been bullying, using homophobia, then you know that will be raised with them in the meeting, if they've been excluded or sent home or whatever (GS, SMT).

One feature of the strong equal opportunities policy present in this school was to build a school culture in which discrimination, intimidation and violence would not be tolerated.

Yes certainly. I think the hope is that obviously our students and our staff are able to work together properly to really support the student holistically and

also to develop a culture and ethos where bullying, where prejudice on any grounds isn't accepted (GS, Int Off).

However, some degree of prejudice relating to same-sex sexuality had been witnessed by staff. There was doubt, however, as to whether pupils had specifically been bullied about their sexuality.

The main form of homophobia that we encounter in this school is just the general use of language 'You're so gay', you know? 'Don't touch her like that you lez', things like that. I think that's the baseline where we have to deal with it in school. I don't know of anyone who's actually been targeted and bullied for being gay (GS, PSHCE Coord).

In part at least, a degree of prejudice or teasing regarding same-sex sexuality among women was seen to be related to pupils being in an all girls' school.

Sometimes when we have new students, and we say to them they've done well to get a place here you know, we kind of boost them all that sort of work that we do. But we do get comments that say 'Oh this is a lezzy school' and all that sort of stuff and I think there is an issue there (...) But certainly people kind of label each other (GS, Int Off).

Along with putting in place equal opportunities policies and practices was the development of a school-wide programme of PSHE and Citizenship. The school had moved from PSHE taught by tutors, sometimes only occasionally, to a programme in which there was a greater amount time dedicated to PSHE and which was led and taught by a team of specialists supported by professional development activities.

In the past, we have had tutors who taught PSHE and a lot of them didn't like teaching it (...) and I think, there are some issues as well that some male teachers found certain aspects of what we do on our citizenship curriculum quite difficult to teach (...) Having a specialist approach certainly works because you can train people, but I think it's also important when you're looking at equal opportunities to train people in how to deal with issues generally around equal opportunities and not shy away from it (GS, SMT).

We had some staff INSET probably about two or three years ago now (...) it challenged a lot of people and a lot of people were quite upset (...) but it gave

us the one thing that sticks with me (...) if we hear anything as teachers, to stop and pull up, not to blink, not to walk down the corridor, hear someone say you lezzy, or you know, but to actually have a *duty* to do something about it (GS, PSHCE Coord).

Rather than being called PSHE, the new programme took the name of the newly compulsory subject, Citizenship. Lessons, however, encompassed sex and relationships (starting in Year 7), friendships, contraception and STIs, and drug use. Participatory styles of teaching were used and lessons included, for Years 10 and 11, visits to a sexual health clinic and discussions with nursing staff there to 'dispel myths and find out about sexual health check-ups'.

Other issues related to personal, social, cultural and religious development were taught through Sociology as well as Religious Studies – with these subjects, alongside PSHE and Citizenship being understood as complementary.

Teaching and learning about homophobia

Staff at the school had made specific attempts to address homophobia with pupils. One teacher had made use of a video about the subject and, although found it to be useful in one way, it was, with regard to the portrayal of the main character, somewhat wanting in another.

However, more useful opportunities for learning about homophobia had come about through a visit to the school by *Big Fish* a Theatre in Education Company. Pupils were said to be able to identify more fully with one character especially.

That's why I think the 'Them and Us' play, by Big Fish, it was great because she was like the girls here, you know she was just a trendy young black woman who didn't stand out, and you wouldn't have necessarily thought she was gay so that was great that sort of challenged their stereotypes (PSHE Coord, GS).

The play stimulated strong emotions among pupils.

That was a very emotive piece, the Year 11s were actually out of their seats when some of the cast were being chased and about to be bullied and the girls

were, 'No! No!' And there was actually a girl in tears at the end, and the guy who played Carl came out and talked to her for a bit because she was just, you know. I thought 'That's great' because they all went out there with this huge sympathy and empathy with the people who had come out as being homosexual. It couldn't have been better (PSHE Coord, GS).

Although this was one of a number of times that external visitors to the school had worked with the school to address homophobia, it was seen as probably providing the most educational opportunities. A discussion facilitated by a practitioner from a local LGBT agency had met with some resistance from a few pupils. The teacher noticed that strongly held positions (of the facilitator as well as of pupils) were not being debated in an open-minded way. The play, however, provided not only a one-off opportunity for learning, but also, with photographs being taken of the performance, provided possibilities for follow-up activities to stimulate discussion at a later date.

Visibility

Respondents noted that there had been a small number of pupils whose sexuality, and expression of it, had proved challenging for school staff to address. However, the challenge for staff not only related to countering prejudice against the pupils, but also how best to address a number of other issues – the possibility that alcohol and recreational drugs were involved, concerns about self-harming, rumours about sex on school premises, and the involvement of parents unsupportive of their daughter having a relationship with another pupil.

Some girls who were out lesbians within school, they left a couple of years ago now, and one of the girls her Mum was just not at all, well, her parents initially were not very supportive of her. And we had huge issues around self harming among other things. But the difficult thing for everyone to deal with is that she would openly sit and cuddle her girlfriend outside you know, they'd hold hands and there were crowds of kids standing round laughing and watching. So, we had to delicately deal with this, with the student and say actually we want to support you but you can't change the world over night (...) But when the parents came in, they were just adamant that they weren't accepting their daughter, and this was disgusting. More so the Dad actually (...) And we had to

help them re-educate them through that whole process (...) You know there have been a few cases like that over the last few years with girls that have been out in school (GS, SMT).

Having pupils who were 'out' was, if not common, then frequent enough for staff to have noticed how other pupils would respond to them. Pupils had on occasions been discriminated against and staff had needed to take action.

In this school, there's been students in the past that have been out, and there are two girls who are actually having a relationship together one in Year 10 one in Year 11, and they actually face quite a bit of prejudice and difficulty. So then the school had to take initiatives to try and support them and also to support the girls who were being prejudiced so that they would understand about why it wasn't acceptable (GS, Int Off).

However, one other respondent felt that, while there may have been problems in the past, there were a number of groups of pupils who would be happy to be friends with, and if needed provide support to, girls who were lesbian or bisexual.

I think there may be odd comments made, but I think the girls who are quite overtly 'out' about their sexuality in school have got such a support group of girls that are, well, they're just strong enough minded that they don't really bother about it. They might have a different experience, but no one has ever come to me and said, you know, 'I'm being bullied because of my sexuality' (GS, PSHCE).

The same respondent went on to talk about some of the friendship groups among pupils, suggested links between these and popular culture, and considering whether this influenced how pupils' expressed their sexuality.

The girls, there is a very close friendship group thing about girls, and I think that's what protects them within the school if they do realise their sexuality. There are very strong groups of friends (...) It's like the music group you know (...) but there's very much a grunge type thing and you'll see some of the Year 11s dressed like that (...) but then is this culture thing linked? I don't know, is there a stereotypical link between the type of music and sexuality? One girl who goes to the [local LGB young people's group] she does stand out. She's got long blonde hair but she, her make-up is like a goth and the rest of it. I

don't know whether she wants to say to the word, or say 'This is the music I like' and 'I'm a lesbian'. Which is far better than hiding behind it all, which I'm sure a lot of them are doing (PSHE Coord, GS).

Staff respondents noted that there were believed to be a variety of perspectives regarding same-sex sexuality among pupils. Some of these made reference to the biological characteristics of men and women to argue for the naturalness of heterosexuality. Others, it was said, would draw on a religious perspective and argue same-sex sexuality to be wrong.

However, other pupils were seen as not agreeing with this position, even know they appeared to need to be seen to distance themselves somewhat from taking an anti-discriminatory stance

Other girls are just very much live and let live, you know. There was quite a quiet, normally, girl and she was saying 'This isn't necessarily what I believe but...' which sort of just covering herself because she didn't want anyone to say, 'Well you're a lesbian then'. She'd say this isn't necessarily what I believe but you've got to think that someone has got their own choice, people are born like this and therefore why does it matter? Does it matter? Who's it hurting? Anybody? (PSHE Coord, GS).

Visibility

Although there was some concern that some pupils may have to conceal their sexuality, among staff, this appeared to be an almost required aspect of their employment. While Black people were visible to others, lesbians and gay men were not.

In part, this was said to protect teachers themselves who, if being out about their sexuality early in their career, could find their employment prospects damaged. At whatever age, staff and students might comment negatively on their sexual practices.

Which is actually quite a difficult thing to deal with because in terms of Black people, you can see when someone's Black obviously but in terms of sexuality there's still a very dodgy area where most, the vast majority of teachers

wouldn't allow students to know whether they are gay or lesbian because there are still issues around that and what the backlash might be (...) If you're a young member of staff and you announce your sexuality, it could collapse your world (...) if you come out you could have reactions of, 'What are you telling us that for? It's nothing to do with us. That's your business.' You could have the reaction, 'Urgh, oh God can you imagine what she does, urgh.' And this is from the staff, as well as the kids (GS, SMT).

If female teachers were unable to be open regarding their sexuality, this could possibly have a negative impact among pupils.

I think in terms of young lesbians in this school, it's very difficult because they haven't visibly got the role models. They can look at women and think. 'Oh, she looks like she might be a lesbian.' But a lot of the time that wouldn't be confirmed. So it's hard for them to have that identifier (GS, SMT).

While this situation was thought by this respondent to be 'unfair', there were said to be 'lots of things that aren't fair and we don't do.' However, the school did strive to work around the principle that staff, wherever possible, should not discuss their personal lives with students. Staff who talked about their personal lives with students isolated others for whom such discussions could be personally and professionally harmful. That said, adopting such a position as a school was said to make it very important to be 'very, very clear' about challenging homophobia.

Next steps

While Citizenship education and the PSHE programme had already been revised, one respondent felt that more could be done to include issues of relevance to lesbian and gay people and their families. Legislative changes, such as those relating to civil partnerships, were thought to be important to include in Citizenship. Furthermore, and reflecting work on anti-racism, more could be made of LGBT history month and the celebration of the lives and contributions of lesbians and gay men,

I think the citizenship curriculum needs to be expanded (...) but in terms of talking about family and relationships, now the law has changed in terms of civil partnerships, I think that's quite important and certainly for our students

who have got lesbian or gay parents or carers then that's important for them to hear that their family life is being respected and valued in school (...) Also when we're talking about celebrating achievement, you know we have black history month we have (...) So I think in terms of celebration there needs to be more celebration about the achievements of lesbian, gay, bisexual people and kind of encouraging staff to be out more. And so that we don't have the same prejudices that are outside college being inside college (GS, Int Off).

One member of the Senior Management Team thought that more could be done at national and local authority level to prioritise work to address homophobia and issues related to same-sex sexualities. Furthermore, checks needed to be put in place to ensure that schools were actually addressing these issues as schools in some local authorities, it was felt, would be less likely than others to take on this work.

Pupils' perspectives

Fifteen pupils in total were interviewed: one group of six girls from year 10 and one group of nine girls from Year 11.

Homophobia and discrimination

When asked about the meaning of homophobia, respondents in Year 11 highlighted the negative meanings attached to the word 'gay'

- P2 People can be just so rude about it. ...
 - P1 It's common to use 'gay' as an insult
 - P2 Yes, yes it is
 - P3 This age group, I think all over the country, it's always counted as a negative thing and not a positive as gay means...
 - P3 Happy
 - P4 Happy
 - P1 It's always seen as a wrong thing and I think that's really bad.
- (GS, Yr11)

After talking about bullying in general at their school, and agreeing that there was very little of it, due in part to it being 'dealt with very quickly', this group of Year 10 girls were asked about bullying and homophobia.

R Can I focus on homophobia now?
P1 What's that?
R I was going to ask you.
P3 I like gay people
R What would you say it is?
P2 I'd say it's someone who's scared of something like ...
P4 That's a phobia
P2 But it's about being scared of people of the same sex being together.
(GS, Yr10)

After initially appearing to be positive about 'gay people', they then distinguished between what they felt about gay men and about lesbians. For these respondents, lesbians were not as liked as gay men due to a belief that a lesbian pupil, for example, might become sexual with another pupil. While one pupil, however, challenged this view, there was a degree of uncertainty – expressed through humour – about the nature of their own sexual desires.

P3 I like gay people but I just don't like lesbians
R Could you say a bit more about that?
P3 Cos if you're a girl and you're friends with a lesbian and say, but you don't know she's a lesbian (...)
P2 Say, she's your friend and she turns into a lesbian (...)
P1 She might come onto you
P3 But if you're friends with a gay person, they're not gonna try and come onto you (...)
P1 But if you think about it, with a gay person they're not going to start touching you, as they fancy men
P2 Gay men, they're lovely
P4 But you can't expect every gay or lesbian to fancy every person of the same sex, 'cos we don't fancy every single boy we meet
P3 Weeeellll....
P(All) (Laughter).
(GS, Yr10)

Year 11 respondents felt that too few in the school understood and accepted differences – whether this related to appearance, musical tastes, or sexuality.

P4 People in this school are really not understanding of people's differences. There's a lot of difference, like if you dress a certain way,

then they don't like that thing, And we're into a certain kind of music that's different than R&B stuff and they automatically think, that we have to be bi or gay or whatever and that's a stereotype. And I don't think the school's very good at saying that's the way it works

P3 Someone said to me that in this school, right, um, that if you look a certain way then you're a lesbian.

R Who are the people that are not good at that...

P2 Some of the teachers and mostly students who don't want to know, they only want to know, like their ways and they don't want to learn about other people.

P3 They're not very open minded

P4 'Cos we're the people of a minority group and the people of a majority group can't understand minority groups, they just disregard them.

(GS, Yr11)

Year 10 respondents did appear to hold stereotypes about lesbians, identifying two distinct 'types'. They also appeared to be made uncomfortable by the thought of two gay men 'together'. That said, witnessing intimate moments between heterosexuals also caused discomfort.

R You said there were manly and female lesbians?

P2 Yeah! Because in a relationship you have a man and you have a woman. And so a lesbian takes on a man role and the other lesbian takes on a woman role.

P3 But we just have a stereotypical thing about gays

R Would you be more anxious about a manly or a female lesbian?

P2 I don't not agree with it, I mean, I don't mind gay people but I don't like them together, it makes me feel uncomfortable. If there's two men together, or two girls

P1 Hand in hand

R What about a man and a woman who were kissing and cuddling?

P2 That still makes me uncomfortable, but I don't stand and watch. You think, 'Get a room!'

P(all) (Laughter).

(GS, Yr 10)

Contributing to the concern regarding lesbians expressed by these respondents was the fear or worry that a lesbian would wish to be sexual with them. While stating that they felt secure about their own sexuality, they expressed some anxiety that a lesbian might be somewhat unable to control her own desires and actions.

- P2 I'm comfortable with my sexuality and nothing a girl could do to me would turn me lesbian. I wouldn't want a girl coming over to me to make me fancy her. I would push her away and tell her to leave me alone and wouldn't talk to her
- P1 If it was my best mate who I had known for so long and they come out with it and we've been best mates then she should know what I like. But if you just go out and meet a girl and she comes onto you, then, I know it sounds horrible but I wouldn't chose to be friends with a lesbian
- R Do you not think that if you told her you were not a lesbian she would say 'ok, that's fine'?
- P2 No. They try and make you want to be lesbian. [Name of girl] used to get her foot and rub it up my leg. And it was quite disturbing
- P1 It's weird having a girl trying to touch you up.
(GS, Yr10)

Learning about homophobia

Both groups of respondents stated that, aside from the play, *Them and Us*, they had been presented with very few opportunities to learn about homophobia. That said, Year 10 respondents spoke of themselves as 'quite loud girls', this being, in part, encouraged by 'sitting in Citizenship classes' from Year 7, 'where we do a lot of discussion, we always chat.'

After watching the play, Year 10 respondents stated that they had learned that people should not be treated differently according to their sexuality. However, they then went on to state that they felt differently for the gay male and lesbian character.

- R Is there anything you've done about homophobia in school?
- P1 Not in school (...) Yeah, we had that play
- P4 I don't remember that
- P1 The play was about discriminating against a gay person
- P2 You feel sorry for them
- P1 Yeah, she was really crying 'cos the gay boy got beaten up. But then when the lesbian girl was getting screamed up by her brother she was sitting there laughing
- P3 Yeah, but, yeah, 'cos, like the white straight person was discriminating against the person, and then when he found she was a lesbian, he was discriminating against her, and the other girl who was meant to be

going out with him, she decided she wanted to be a lesbian 'cos her best friend was lesbian. Then the boy was discriminating against all of them, so in the end he didn't have any friends

P1 Yeah, Billy No Mates

P2 Cos he decided he didn't like any of them so he didn't have any friends

R What did you take away from the play?

P1 It's not fair to treat people differently because of their sexuality.

(GS,Yr10)

Respondents from Year 11 stated that they had had just 'one' debate or discussion about homophobia in PSHE or Citizenship during their time at school. However, one student, for her Sociology coursework had focussed on 'changing attitudes to gay and lesbian people and families' a course of study that she had found interesting and which had 'opened my eyes to the different variations there can be.'

The perceptions of Year 11 respondents regarding the play were generally positive as it raised the visibility of issues and provided a counter to views held by parents.

P1 I thought [the play] was really good and like it was good to show other people that it's around and people are experiencing problems about what they are and how they are and I thought they displayed that well, And they, it was good to inform people and we got a little sheet about it.

P2 It was good as well 'cos most plays are mostly about racial attacks and things like that and so most people disregard it, if they're gay or lesbian or something they think they don't get beaten up or anything so I thought it was good for that

P1 Um, people have been brought up with the norms their families teach them and people are unaware of, seeing that play, even those little things that people say to each other can be horrible, whereas they don't normally see it.

(GS, YR11)

Girls also spoke about discussions held with family members about lesbians and gay men. More often than not, respondents from Year 11 had some contact with lesbian or gay relatives – a brother, an uncle and a mother. Although there had been some negative reactions to family disclosures, these, on the whole, appeared to have been resolved.

- P3 I think family made me stop and think, 'cos my brother is gay and so is my uncle and I've always grown up with it and it's always been a way of life. If you're exposed to it from an early age then, not just from books but from people being there, then that's the way it is. And I think, it's good, I've always known that there's been a different way and I think that's good and not being scared of it. And in the family there's nothing bad there
- P2 I think the family is important 'cos my Mum's gay as well and when my Nan found out she was like, really like, done something bad to the family like killed someone. But yet, my Mum's sister, she was very supportive and everything. She doesn't mind gay and lesbian people, but she doesn't like it in her face, but how she can say that when her own daughter's gay I don't know.

(GS, YR11)

Respondents from Year 10, however, appeared more often aware of situations where lesbians or gay men had not been accepted by their family: a 'quite homophobic Nana'; a girl who was scared to come out to her parents; a brother 'who doesn't like gays'; and a wife who 'turned lesbian' and abandoned her children.

- P2 My family like gay people but they don't like lesbians 'cos of the fact of what has happened in the past. My uncle, his wife, she turned lesbian, and they had a kid and she just walked out and hasn't spoken to them for the last five years. And my family don't like lesbians 'cos that what happened to our family. My cousin's likely to be ruined, she was a lesbian and didn't really care about them
- R There are lots of lesbian Mums who are really caring
- P2 Yes, but she just walked out, she lives right around the corner from where they are she knows they're there and she chooses not to talk to them (...)
- R What about if she had left her husband and kept in touch with her children?
- P2 Yeah, right, I'd feel more comfortable about that. The fact that she doesn't, my cousin is 10 now and the fact that she's just grown up with my uncle, then
- P1 I think, I grew up with no Dad, but I had brothers. I think it's important to have a man figure and a female figure. Ok, my Dad walked out, but if my Mum had walked out I would have been more upset than what I am.

(GS, Yr10)

Visibility

Respondents from both year groups were aware of girls at the school who identified as lesbian, or at least had mentioned that they were bisexual. Year 11 respondents spoke about an occasion, also mentioned by staff, when, four years previously, two girls were kissing and being watched by other students. These respondents believed that the girls had been expelled for this – a response they disagreed with. For it appeared not only to show that staff felt two girls kissing to be wrong, but also unjust, given that kissing between a male and female student in a co-educational school would not result in expulsion.

- P3 I remember when I first came to this school there were some Year 11s and they were lesbians and I remember being little and not being very aware of it. One day they were kissing and I saw it, and there was people around. It was really strange – there were their friends thinking that was normal but there were others who were saying ‘Oh that’s disgusting, get them away’. And I remember watching, and thinking about the difference in how people see it. And the teachers came along and took them away and split them up. And did they get expelled or something?
- P2 Yes, they did
- P4 I think that’s wrong
- P3 Yeah, but if that had been in a mixed school then it would have been alright it would have been, ‘Just don’t do it again, it’s not appropriate in school’, but they got expelled.
- P4 In mixed school girls and boys are allowed to kiss. It like emphasises that it’s wrong to be gay by expelling them.
- P3 I was really surprised, with the school, that they expelled the students for being what they are. It doesn’t put out a good message.
- (GS, Yr11)

Respondents from Year 10 appeared hesitant in deciding whether they would accept a friend who came out as lesbian – this, in part, imbued with concerns that the friend would wish to be sexually physical with them.

Members of the same group, however, were definite that if they, as girls, were somewhat negative towards lesbian students at the school, the situation would be far worse were the school co-educational, therefore including aggressive boys.

- P2 It's an all girls school and if there were lesbians here then some girls would be wary
- P4 No, but some would be understanding
- P3 Yeah a bit like avoiding totally
- R Would it be different if there were boys here?
- P2 I think it would be. I think if there were boys here, then, if a girl come out saying she was a lesbian then she would have, the girls are bad enough cos they're bitchy but if boys, I think they get violent, I think if they don't like the girl and then she comes out with it and if there's like gay boys, then they'd get beaten up
- P1 'Cos boys are more violent than girls.
(GS, Yr10)

Respondents from Year 11 indicated that they too felt that boys would be less accepting than girls regarding lesbian and gay students. They also suggested that it was difficult for gay men to 'come out' as they had to conform to one of two media stereotypes: effeminate or masculine.

But after talking about these stereotypes of gay men, Year 11 respondents were hard pressed to identify much in the way of media images of lesbians: one production on Sky television, the other on Channel 4. Rather than presenting stereotypes of young lesbians, these media were understood as helpful to young people.

- R And what about images of lesbians?
- P1 There's a, I haven't seen it, but it's called the 'L word' and it's...
- P2 It's like something like Sex and the City and it's about women going around and having relationships and stuff.
- P7 It's on Sky
- P1 I also thought Sugar Rush was quite good. It's also a book.
- P6 I think it's good 'cos there's not much support for young people and I think things like that, they see it, and it's good.
(GS, Yr11)

Next steps

Among both groups, respondents were keen that the school provided further opportunities to discuss homophobia. They noted that there were often sanctions against racism, or encouragement to be anti-racist, while there were not similar

proscriptions and prescriptions regarding homophobia. Even among Year 10 students who appeared concerned or anxious about lesbians, they considered equality before the law to be an important principle

- P1 Everybody, all the police, saying that everyone's equal, it's all the same for lesbians and gays and bisexuals. If they can make such a big deal about racism, in schools they have racist things, they don't exactly make as much of an effort for gays and lesbians and bisexuals
- R And you think they should?
- P2 Yeah, 'cos in schools they go around and when we do our thoughts for the days it's about racism, there's never anything about homophobia or gays and lesbians. They sit there and say 'so and so's been discriminated against 'cos they're black' but you don't hear that for gays
- P3 People don't like being discriminated against for whatever.
(GS, Yr10)

Year 11 respondents also felt that the government should make it clear that homophobia was not allowed and argued that people should be 'arrested for making homophobic comments'. They also stated that there was a need to portray more accurately the lives of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, so better reflecting and responding to actual sexual diversity.

Summary

Homophobia was addressed by some staff in the school, particularly through equal opportunity policies, PSHE and Citizenship. Particular efforts had been made to introduce awareness of relationships, sexualities and homophobia into the curriculum. There were, however, concerns expressed that staff should not be open about their sexual identity. Pupils provided a number of definitions of homophobia and, although all appeared to be against homophobia, some girls appeared concerned about same-sex sexuality among girls due in part to concerns about expressions of sexual desire. Some pupils, though, were concerned that girls who had kissed one another had been unfairly excluded from the school. Pupils felt that it would be harder to address same-sex sexuality issues if boys were present in the school. Pupils

also thought that, with regard to issues of equality, sexuality should be treated in a similar way to racism.

The Boys' School

This boys' school, located in South East London, was reported to be a larger than average, with around 1,150 pupils on roll. Around 37% of pupils were White British. Other pupils included those who are Black African, Black Caribbean and Black British, Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi). Thirty one per cent of pupils were reported to be eligible for free school meals. Thirty one per cent of pupils had been identified as having special educational needs, which was reported to be 'well above' the national average.

The school was judged by Ofsted (2002) to be 'good (...) with many very good and some excellent features' (p.7). The headteacher was reported to provide 'excellent leadership' and was 'supported by the teamwork of a highly effective senior management team' (p.7).

Throughout the school, relationships were reported to be 'very good', the behaviour and attitudes of pupils are 'good' and 'high quality care and support ensure that pupils are known, valued and supported to achieve' (p.7). The school was said to 'function well' as a community.

Pupils' personal development was judged to be promoted 'very well' and were said to find the school a 'happy place' and to feel 'secure and safe' and the school was considered to have a 'very caring and supportive ethos' (p.28).

Pupils were involved in the life of the school and were given a 'good level of responsibility' (p.24). Pupils in the upper school had been trained as mentors and counsellors and 'often give advice and guidance to younger pupils'. Furthermore, pupils were said to have a 'noticeable respect for the feelings of others, and displayed

‘tolerance and patience’. There was reported to be a ‘noticeable lack of ‘laddish’, ‘macho’ behaviour by the boys’ (p.16).

Some ‘silly’ or ‘occasionally more serious’ incidents were reported. Members of staff were said to have effectively managed these and reinforced the school’s ‘clearly established’ rules. Incidents of bullying were reportedly ‘rare’. When bullying did occur, parents stated that it was dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils, too, were ‘firmly of the view that any incidents of poor behaviour and bullying were dealt with by the staff effectively and that such incidents were extremely rare’ (p.29).

The school was reported to have a ‘deep commitment’ to equal opportunities. As well as diversity among staff with regard to age, gender and ethnicity (staff were said to act as role models with regard to inclusion), pupils were expected to respect differences of culture, race and gender. The provision for pupils’ personal, cultural and spiritual development was said to be ‘very good’.

While pupils’ development was addressed across the school, Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) was said, in particular, to contribute to this development and had a ‘high status’ in the school (p.24). Provision for pupils with special educational needs was judged to be ‘very good’ (p.26).

Year 11 pupils were observed discussing homophobia with ‘particular maturity’ and considered the subject with ‘remarkable sensitivity’ (p.55). Discussion took place within an atmosphere of trust generated by the teacher who laid down clear ground rules and created a ‘safe ethos’, enabling pupils to contribute ‘confidently’ (p.55).

Pupils were reported to be good at speaking, listening and explaining. When responding to questions they spoke ‘confidently’ and could give ‘extended answers’ (p.14). Pupils themselves stated that they found discussion and working in groups ‘particularly helpful’ with regard to learning (p.18)

Staff perspectives

Three members of staff were interviewed: two members of the Senior Management Team (SMT1 & SMT2) (one of whom was also the PSHE Coordinator) and a PSHE teacher (PSHE)

Inclusivity, Citizenship and PSHE

Respondents highlighted a number of key factors that affected their work on homophobia. These included promoting an inclusive ethos or culture, providing PSHE and Citizenship through specialist teachers, and establishing links between a number of equal opportunities issues (such as racism and homophobia). However, ensuring that staff could provide leadership, and were supported to do so through Continuing Professional Development, was seen to be an essential aspect contributing to the life of the school.

One member of the senior leadership team talked about the school's ethos – identifying links between this and pupil achievement.

We are an inclusive school and provide a safe environment for most children and children do well (...) I think that we have quite a strong ethos and people generally have to fall into line with the ethos of school (BS, SMT1).

Of particular importance to this same respondent, however, was the work done to establish good quality PSHE and Citizenship. A dedicated teacher and a specialist team of staff taught PSHCE across four school 'houses'.

Pupils took part in PSHCE classes once a week from Year 7 to Year 13 and were taught, through a curriculum organised by Key Stages, by a dedicated PSHE teacher and an experienced and willing pastoral team. The emphasis in PSHCE was on discussion, dialogue and debate – a style of teaching and learning that was promoted and supported through continuing professional development.

I mean, they have a particular teaching style on PSHCE it's very much about discussion, it's very much about generating talk. We're certainly not about

hundreds of worksheets, it's the way we try to encourage all teachers, and we do give them Inset and we do train them around our practice and the ways of working, is about generating that dialogue getting the student to be quite free and open and talk about topics and situations (BS, SMT2).

This style of teaching and learning – complemented by provision such as counselling and anger management sessions – was said to help establish among the boys, and staff, a culture of listening and talking.

Recognising homophobia within the school

While staff in the school sought to promote a culture of inclusiveness, provide good pastoral care and emphasise the place of dialogue among and between students and staff, there was also an explicit recognition of homophobia. As with racism, its presence in the school and wider society could not be ignored.

I think homophobia is ever present and it's always there, and in our society we could never fool ourselves by thinking it doesn't exist or we've eradicated it, it would be a foolish line to go down, it's a bit like racism. The school has taken a stance on it, what we say to them we don't accept it, we don't accept that kind of attitude or behaviour but we recognise that it's there, ever present (BS, SMT2).

For another member of staff, his one-to-one and counselling work with students had led him to identify an absence. While other issues, such as relationship problems and abuse, were being brought to individual sessions, noticeably lacking were concerns about homophobic bullying or around same-sex sexuality. For this respondent, this told him something about the school.

[I was doing] one-to-one work and I became aware that the one area that was not really being addressed or the one area that I was not being presented with was homophobic bullying or issues around sexuality. Given the fact the depth of things I was being presented with, right through from problems with girlfriends to rape and child abuse, I was just absolutely amazed that there was nothing about homophobia (...) it seemed there was no place in this school for those discussions (BS, PSHE).

The school had developed statements regarding the unacceptability of various forms of prejudice driven behaviour. However, and as two respondents recognised, declarations regarding the unacceptability of homophobia and homophobic bullying were not necessarily translated into practice, creating a situation, it was said, not dissimilar to failing to address racism. One respondents recognised that some pupils had noticed a disparity between what should, and what actually, happened.

(...) we have cards around the school that says no racism, no sexism or homophobic bullying, but that's kind of where it is. There are still students that complain all the time that teachers don't pick it up (BS, PSHE).

Providing and building on training

A member of the senior management team reported that an assessment of staff attitudes regarding homophobia had been conducted which showed that many staff were uncertain about how best to counter it. Following this, a number of opportunities were provided to staff to encourage them to challenge homophobia. External experts were brought in – from the local Healthy Schools Programme, from a local specialist LGBT agency and from a Theatre In Education group that had developed a play that addressed homophobia and bullying

As a result of this work, the school was now said to have a number of members of staff who would work to challenge homophobia in and out of classrooms, and who provided leadership when addressing the topic.

Staff will now go into assemblies and do something on homophobic bullying and senior leaders are very clear about that and won't back off and that will be fed down to more insecure staff (BS, SMT2).

One other respondent also recognised that homophobia was now addressed by a number of different teachers.

[Tackling homophobia] definitely would appear in English and there are some science teachers who would definitely tackle that, there are teachers that in subjects, if it was homophobic language that was being used or homophobic

bullying that was being identified, they would tackle it. The drama production this year, we had two drama productions this year, one had a gay theme story line and the second one, which was an examination piece, was about the death of a gay young man, so, yes, it's being tackled in other areas (BS, PSHE).

However, there were a number of factors that were perceived to potentially disorient the outcomes of work that had been put in place to address homophobia. These included the possibility of staff turnover and change.

There is no way that a school can be complacent. We are an inclusive school, but that does not mean in six years time that could change. It could a change of Head, senior leaders and managers that leads to a change in attitudes (BS, SMT1).

Another respondent noted that some staff, who were lesbian, gay or bisexual themselves, may prefer homophobia not to be addressed at all.

Other members of staff if they're lesbian, gay or bisexual themselves, they don't feel happy about this kind of work, or don't want the issues to be raised anymore, just let things lie (BS, PSHE).

Indeed, this same respondent had experienced what was felt to be a degree of concern and prejudice among school staff regarding same-sex sexuality issues. He had 'come out' to a few students about being gay and this appeared to have helped one or two students to be open about their sexuality too. However, and despite anti-discriminatory legislation, he felt there was little, professionally, to guide him when being honest about his sexuality.

They do get scared particularly on the work on homophobia and the real stinger has been me coming out to some students this year – which is the one thing I think that's made the difference to the visibility of gay and bisexual kids in the school – but [coming out] is the one thing that really made senior staff wince. Although what I thought they might do is just ban it outright, but they didn't when I told them why I was doing it. But I do hate all that stuff about, they're very into role models and I don't really like that and I'm perceived as being the good gay role model in this school even though I'm not out to all the students, I'm still the good gay role model. I had to remind myself that

according to equal opportunities it shouldn't make a damn whether I'm out or not, in fact I should have the right to be out, in the school, everywhere 'cos it shouldn't make any difference (...) I'm at a place always to be guiding myself because I'm going into the dark with this (BS, PSHE).

One respondent, a member of the senior management team, recognised that the school may not be as safe a place as it might be for students to talk about their feelings about being gay. They could, it was suggested, talk about their feelings in an indirect manner.

Even though some students might not feel, still not feel open and be able to say. 'Well, I'm gay' but equally they could talk in a kind of discursive way with their friends and what we try to do is to promote this opportunity to share, discuss, debate (BS, SMT2).

The teacher who talked about his sexuality with students during one class explained how this had not only enabled one student to talk about his own feelings, but also helped other students to raise concerns about the welfare of other students who were felt to be concerned about their sexuality.

Coming out to a class, I would not do that as common practice, but it was the time the place and the situation was right and the student that came out to me as a result of that said if you hadn't come out in class I never would have told you (...) In Year 9 there was one student that was outed and then chose to own up himself (...) other students who aren't necessarily GB, just from the work that they've done, they come to me and say 'I think you should talk to this boy because he's being bullied for this, that and the other and I think he's gay'. So that's a wider community thing and it's very positive (BS, PSHE).

Next Steps

A number of factors appeared to contribute to embedding and sustaining work to address homophobia across the school. This included establishing an inclusive ethos in the school and promoting a culture of dialogue and discussion among students. Mentioning homophobia together with other equal opportunities issues, such as racism, in school policies was said to provide staff with a degree of confidence when teaching about homophobia.

With regard to race, ethnicity and homophobia, one other member of the senior management team stated it was educationally unhelpful to start from a position that assumed homophobia among African-Caribbean students.

There's a message coming out, I don't know from which community and I think it's to do with reggae culture and homophobic lyrics, there is a kind of discourse in education which is to do with African Caribbean actually hating gay people, and that Black people hate gay people. I think that's very dangerous and highly racist because it's racialising homophobia (...) I think it's highly dangerous as you can't find anyone more homophobic than some of those White people in middle America. So I think we've got to stop racialising that discourse (BS, SMT1).

Furthermore, legislative change was said to have made it easier to address homophobia in this school. Equalising the age of consent was felt to have made it 'less risky' to address issues of same-sex attraction among students. Expecting that children and young people should enjoy good mental health meant that the priorities laid out in *Every Child Matters* could be used to establish an interest in the work. In addition, the outcomes arising from the work itself, such as reducing hostility among students, could be used to help make a case for the school to maintain its commitment to teaching about homophobia

Pupils' perspectives

Twenty two pupils were interviewed: one group of ten Year 9 boys and one group of 12 Year 10 boys.

Homophobia, bullying and cussing

When talking about what homophobia meant to them, boys in both groups highlighted issues related to prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping – all of these viewed as wrong by respondents.

- R I want to ask you about homophobia. First of all, what does it mean?
P4 Discrimination. Against sex and...
P7 It's people, when they act in a certain way, people assume that they're gay, that's what I think

R In what way do people act so that others assume they're gay?
 P2 The way they walk, the way they speak
 P9 Their appearance
 P10 What some people do, like they don't play football or something like that
 R Can people who aren't gay get bullied because of homophobia?
 P6 Yes.
 (BS, Yr9)

R I'd like to move onto homophobia – what do you think it means?
 P1 It means , like, people have prejudices against people who are homosexual or lesbian simply for the fact that they don't think it's right. It's using their views to try and make someone feel bad basically
 P2 Basically, like a way to cuss them 'cos they might be gay or lesbian or whatever, it's like, it's hard to explain in words but I know what I mean
 P3 I think it's like one of the worst possible ways to insult someone about their sexuality and like, if someone has like the tiniest hint of being gay or says something that might be considered as gay then immediately that person has something hanging over them about what they believe in. And homophobia is like a big insult towards if you like the same sex or whatever.
 (BS, Yr10)

Respondents were aware of the schools' public statements about the unacceptability of bullying. However, they had witnessed bullying taking place – and a few respondents indicated that they themselves had been bullied. Firmer action, they said, was needed to prevent and stop bullying and to confront those who bullied.

The use of the term 'gay' was said to be prevalent and used on many occasions, often disparagingly. Even singing a song that appeared inappropriate to a boy's gender and putative sexual desires was deemed enough to label the singer as gay.

R What sorts of things have you come across in this school about homophobia and bullying?
 P8 People in this school say it for anything, like if you hit someone they say 'he's so gay' or whatever, they say it for basically everything
 (BS, Yr9)

- P7 I've got an example, it's a bit stupid, but there's someone in our class that quite likes singing and when he was in French class he started singing 'It's raining men' and like, just since then, I think he just liked the song and he started singing it then and then everybody then like started calling him gay and he's not been able to get away from it. He sang the first line and then everybody went, 'Ooh' and since then he's been called gay.

(BS, Yr10)

Respondents made a distinction between bullying and 'cussing'. Minor perceived infringements of a student's appearance, such as wearing the wrong style of trousers or inappropriately coloured socks, could lead to either bullying or cussing. The latter was seen to be less serious than the former, although there was a suggestion that the distinction between the two depended, in part, on how a student responded to negative comments.

- P1 It happens 'cos of the clothes they wear and stuff. Some people dress in all different types, some people in baggy trousers some with their trousers half way down, it's different. Like people who wear baggy trousers they're most likely to get bullied
- P7 The colour of what you wear, like pink, or white socks or ankle socks
- P11 Like, if you (...) the trousers have to be the right length, or you get cussed or bullied
- R Ah, cussed or bullied, are they different
- P <chorus> Yeah
- P7 There's taking the mick out of someone and then being bullied
- P10 Some people, it depends how they take it, as some people can just shrug it off.

(BS, Yr9)

All respondents agreed that homophobic bullying and even cussing could cause harm in on way or another. In particular, respondents focussed on the effects that the routine use of the word 'gay' might have on gay people themselves. One respondent noted that, even if a person was not gay, they could be caused distress if they had a gay relative.

- P1 Yeah, like, it's like two different meanings the way we use it

- P3 Yeah, meaning that's gay or that's crap, like the teacher saying you've got detention and you say 'that's gay'.
- R Does that matter if it's used in that way at all?
- P3 It still does, 'cos it's still using the word in a bad sense 'cos now the word is so regularly used
- P8 I think the way people use the word gay is for anything that's slightly annoying, if you're gay then you'd probably be quite offended by it, if something's annoying and you're making it linked to being gay then it's like things that are bad are gay and gay must be bad, like that, some sort of equivalent.

(BS, Yr10)

- P5 I don't think they realise, say if there is a gay person in the room, and some person said 'why are you being gay for' the person who said that cannot realise what it means to that person
- P1 The effect it would have, the gay person would be upset (...) Because people are being like disrespectful and stuff and in the school if someone's cussing about being gay and someone who is gay is in the room it doesn't make them feel, it makes them feel wrong about themselves
- P7 Also if they've got family members that are gay they might feel like they've said something, they might take offence at it.

(BS, Yr9)

Learning about homophobia

When talking about how their views and thoughts about homophobia had been shaped, respondents made some mention of the influences of family members and friends. More often than not, they indicated that relatives had somewhat negative views about gay people.

Respondents in Year 9 mentioned the influence of religion on people's views about gay people – in particular, the impact of Rastafarianism and fundamentalist Christianity.

- P9 Sometimes it's against your religion to go with gays
- R Which religions?
- P8 Rastafarian. You're not allowed to be gay. They'd kill you
- P2 And Christian
- P10 That's not true.

P3 What happens if you're rasta and gay?

P7 They chop off your dreadlocks.

<laughter>

(BS, Yr9)

However, more influential than relatives or religion, for these respondents at least, were the discussions they had taken part in during PSHE lessons. These had provided them with opportunities to consider what it might be like being a gay student. In discussing prejudice related to homophobia, respondents indicated that this had led them to consider other forms of prejudice. One particular theme highlighted by respondents related to the ways that they themselves might feel or act if a friend or student they knew told them he was gay. Respondents stated that they appreciated such opportunities to clarify their views and learn about new issues.

R What sorts of things have you done here about talking about homophobia?

P3 Sort of like, earlier on in this year, everybody in your year found out that this boy was gay and we spent the lesson talking about that, what people had heard and what the person might feel.

R How did the lesson go?

P4 Gives you an opportunity to speak your mind.

(BS, Yr9)

P3 We have discussions about what you think about it and discussions that it's wrong to discriminate, not only against people who are gay, but that leads onto other prejudices as well. We done work on how to say if we had someone who we knew came out how we might deal with that.

P4 We talked about basically everything you need to know about culture and dealing with thinking that you may be gay and like how to get help and stuff to realise if you are or not. And, like, if your friend might be gay how to treat him in the same way that you have, as you may treat him differently for the way he is. Like, the right ways and the wrong ways to treat the person the same.

P5 Yeah, to have long discussions with staff about one thing and that always leads to another thing, and eventually you end up with most of it covered, so it's good to try and discuss and learn new stuff.

(BS, Yr10)

Being at a boys' school

For Year 9 respondents, a major concern related to attending an all boys' school. A few respondents had been fearful of attending an all boys' school, imagining that they would be held captive and sexually assaulted by groups of students in the school's toilets.

P2 I was scared to come to this school 'cos I thought there might be boys here who would jump on me. I didn't want to come here 'cos I heard it was kinda ...

P3 ... In the toilets

P2 ... that they lock you in the toilets and a gang would do it.

(BS, Yr9)

Respondents stated that violence and discrimination – particularly with regard to homophobia – was likely to be worse at a boys' school than at a co-educational school. The presence of girls, it was thought, would contribute to an ethos more accepting of sexual diversity.

P7 Mixed schools are a better place

P6 I think in single sex schools it's harder to be gay or lesbian because people will be more cautious of you or discriminative than if you were in like a multi-sex school. I think in a multi-sex school there's like, not really, if people find out you're gay or like lesbian then not much will happen. But I think if like in a school like here people might start bullying or picking on them 'cos they are gay or lesbian

P8 I think men who are gay have a harder time than women who are gay and I think it's much worse if you're openly gay in a boys' school than in a girls' school. I don't really know why. It just seems that girls are less discriminating

P (few voices) Yeah

P7 It's harder if you're gay in a boys' school than if you are in a mixed school 'cos in a mixed school, yeah, there is all different people. But all the boys, they say that, 'You don't want to do that'.

(BS, Yr9)

Consideration of the relationship between discrimination, violence and sexuality led one respondent to question whether gay students should be allowed to attend an all boys' school at all. Furthermore, there was a degree of anxiety that gay students might be unable to control their sexual desires and behaviour which would lead to unwanted sexual advances towards heterosexual students.

However, a number of respondents challenged this view. One was of the view that it was heterosexual students who teased and touched others in a homophobic way. Another felt that segregation, in the longer term, was no way to deal with diversity – and highlighted a lesson he had learned from segregation on the grounds of ethnicity in the USA.

- P5 Straight boys are more sexually active than gay people because they, in classes, straight boys, you were saying that straight boys touch people to take the mick out of them, you don't see gay people doing that? So they don't act it, they keep their sexuality to themselves.
(BS, Yr9)

- P2 About what [name] said, if that did happen and they tried to stop gay people going to all boys school, then I think that would be worse in the long term, 'cos then like, I think, look what happened in America when there was all that division between Black people and White people, that all changed because of like people's opinions were changing about Black people and White people and going hand in hand. And people saw that everyone could go along with everybody. And I think it's the same for gay people and straight people, if you separate them the situation gets worse.
(BS, Yr9)

Visibility and standing up for others

Most respondents stated that they knew of gay or bisexual students in their school. While they stated that there were many homophobic incidents in their school, one respondent appeared pleasantly surprised by the reaction of classmates to a student who had come out as bisexual.

- P4 There's someone in our class who's bisexual and I'm fine with it. He's being the way that he wants to be and stuff. The response to it when he came out in class was fine, 'cos I was expecting it to be really bad, but I'm actually really surprised how good it has been, I haven't seen any cussing to do with him or anything like that, which is good though. I did thought it was going to be really bad, but it's ok.
(BS, Yr10)

All respondents were of the view that homophobia and especially homophobic bullying was wrong, with most adding that they would wish to stand up for a gay student if being bullied. However, they stated that in doing so, there could be repercussions. Standing up for a gay student might mean that they themselves would become a target of homophobic abuse. Furthermore, even taking an anti-discriminatory stance during discussions could lead to a student experiencing homophobic abuse. Of particular concern to Year 9 respondents was being called 'gay' themselves, thus leading to uncomfortable feelings of being 'under pressure'.

- P2 Like if we're having a discussion about someone being gay and they might be really against it or defending someone who is gay and they might feel that that person is gay.
- R If you're standing up for someone who is gay, would that be a problem if someone said you might be gay?
- P2 Yes. You might get, they might start to take the mick out of you and put pressure on you
- P6 Put pressure on you. Say if that person is straight and they are defending the gay person, then some member of that group could call the straight person gay, pressure will sort of start building up and it's quite hard to defend that gay person when you're being called gay. So it's quite hard.
- P2 So there is a pressure trying to stand up for that person then they might discriminate against you 'cos you're standing up for them. So you might get bullied even worse or people feel too frightened to stand up for people who are gay and they don't like people cussing them.
- P11 If it's just one person getting bullied by lots of people about being gay and then just one person stood up for them then everybody would say 'Oh, you're his boyfriend'.
(BS, Yr9)

Next steps

When asked about what the school should do to prevent homophobic bullying, respondents stated that greater action should be taken against those who bully. However, they also had messages for other students, some of them directed to gay students, others to the student body more widely. Among Year 9 respondents, suggestions to others included: 'Try and be confident'; 'Be yourself'; 'Be who you are'; 'Don't be scared'; 'Give them support'; 'Accept them for what they are'; 'Don't caricature and don't stereotype'; and 'Try and be more supportive so that you can help them more and help them to 'come out';

Respondents in Year 10 appeared as concerned as those in Year 9 about the feelings and welfare of gay students. They noted, in particular, that if a student were to talk about their same-sex sexuality then they should consider who might best be told. And, perhaps reflecting the views they held of their own teacher, a PSHE teacher was an adult who would act confidentially and who could be trusted.

- R Are there messages you want to give to other schools to get them to do work in this area. What would you say?
- P1 Don't judge a book by its cover, people who are gay or not gay, just bullying the way someone looks on the outside that's not to be, it's their decision so you can't say they're wrong.
- P2 Treat them the same as you treated them before as they're not a different person.
- P3 People's sexuality, gay or straight, that person is still a person, it shouldn't really matter, 'cos sex is a private part of your life and it shouldn't matter anyway.
- P4 Basically, if you're gay just go, if you want to tell people, tell people the right way 'cos some people might take it the wrong way and it may make it sound like a bad thing when really it's not.
- P8 I'll tell you, if someone wants to tell people about being gay then they should probably think carefully about who they should tell 'cos what happened in this school somebody told someone and somehow, not sure how, someone else found out. So if you are going to tell someone don't tell someone who you don't trust.
- P5 Don't be afraid to speak up because if you speak to the right person about it then they can discuss it with you.

- P6 There should be a teacher there to help you, speak to your PSHE teacher.
- P7 If you haven't got decent friends, then there are special people like the PSHE teacher you can go to, someone you can trust.
- (BS, Yr10)

Summary

Staff respondents in the boys' school reported that they strove to promote an inclusive culture and a strong ethos of equal opportunities. Particular efforts had been made to include homophobia in PSHE. The school encouraged boys to discuss issues and to express themselves. The difficulties staff had in challenging homophobia were identified and professional development activities put in place. Pupils provided a range of definitions regarding homophobia, were against homophobic bullying and generally against other forms of discrimination related to same sex sexualities. Pupils appreciated the detailed discussions they had about homophobia during PSHE. Some pupils felt that being in an all boys school made it harder to be against homophobia – and some boys felt it was hard to stand up and challenge homophobia in a publicly visible way.

Chapter 5 – Summary and discussion

The aim of this study was to generate new knowledge about how case study schools were tackling homophobia and bullying. In particular, the study sought to identify the sorts of issues or problems that had led to homophobia being addressed, the ways that homophobia had actually been addressed, what views about homophobia were held by staff and students, and whether responses to homophobic bullying had shaped teachers' and pupils' sense of themselves.

This chapter provides an overview of the key themes that arose from the case studies and discusses a number of issues outlined in the introduction, particularly with regard to making the most of national policy and guidance, countering homophobia through school improvement, extending Sex and Relationship Education and teaching issues related to same-sex sexuality as non-controversial. The chapter concludes with an outline of the implications of the study for my own professional practice.

Understandings of homophobia and bullying

The schools

As their latest Ofsted reports noted, case study schools were good or excellent with regard to creating a safe and secure ethos and environment. Schools were praised for the work that staff had undertaken to promote inclusion, equal opportunities – and for the encouragement given to pupils in their cultural, social and moral development. At the girls' school, 'very good opportunities' were provided through PSHE, Citizenship and Sociology to address a range of moral and social issues. At the coeducational school (and despite the poor quality physical environment), pupils were provided with 'many opportunities' to explore values and belief systems. Bullying was reported not to be an issue at the school. The boys' school was considered to have very caring and supportive ethos with a noticeable lack of 'laddish' and 'macho' behaviour among pupils.

Views of staff

Developing school policies

When describing the work they had undertaken to address homophobia, teachers in this study routinely made mention of the broader context within which such work took place. A few mentioned that the changing legislative context (such as the equalisation of the age of consent and the priorities laid out in *Every Child Matters*) had made it easier for schools to take steps to address homophobia.

For example, staff reported that their schools' equal opportunities and anti-bullying policies often provided a framework through which homophobia might be countered. Furthermore, building a supportive ethos, conducive to learning, was not only believed to be important, but was also seen as something that had to be worked towards actively. Indeed, in the girls' and boys' school in particular, senior staff reported that they would stand firm on upholding their principles of equal opportunities for all, holding firm against parental dissent.

Making homophobia visible

One important commonality across the three case study schools was that staff had to recognise the existence of homophobia in order to tackle it. As Epstein et al (2003) note, homophobia can often be ignored or not noticed as a problem for schools to address; it may simply not be visible (Warwick et al, 2001). Staff respondents in each of the schools stated that they had come to recognise homophobia as a problem in the school as a result of its routine expression as verbal abuse among pupils and, in the girls' school, through its absence from equal opportunities policies which made reference to other equal opportunities issues such as racism and sexism.

One respondent in the boys' school who taught PSHE, also noted that pupils did not readily mention discrimination related to same-sex sexuality during counselling sessions – even when many other issues were raised. This was thought to be a strange absence, suggesting to the respondent that there was no room in the school for such

discussions with staff and pupils alike being unable to articulate, and communicate about, such issues.

In the girls' school, a small number of girls were said to have openly identified as lesbian. Staff respondents had recognised that these pupils had, at least in the past, experienced discrimination. Pupils were now perceived to be generally, although not altogether, supportive towards lesbians and same-sex attracted pupils. Some staff felt that they too needed to engage with the range of perspectives held by pupils and provide opportunities for the girls to articulate these.

Preparing staff to respond to homophobia

While the recognition of a problem may be the starting point for constructive engagement with it, the concrete steps that need to be taken to deal positively with an issue such as homophobia can be more complex to identify and carry out. As Watkins et al (2005) have noted with regard to creating violence-resilient schools, a 'can do' attitude to addressing violence appears to be a necessary step in finding solutions. That is, those in schools have to feel they have the means to address violence-related problems or, at least, identify what steps that need to be taken to do so.

While staff in all three case study schools had begun to include homophobia when developing new equal opportunities and bullying policies, teacher respondents recognised a need to complement this with staff development opportunities. In the boys' school, a questionnaire to staff asked them to identify how they would address homophobia. Findings revealed some concern and confusion among staff about what they would do – a situation said to be not uncommon in the other two schools. Those organising training in each school had drawn on the expertise of a local voluntary agency that provided support services for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people and which had developed a training programme for schools. Respondents recognised there to be a varying levels of interest, commitment, understanding and skills among staff to tackle homophobia.

This, in part, related to the recognition that a single workshop would not resolve or allay all the concerns of staff. Sustained and collaborative professional development activities are more likely to produce desired results (Cordingly et al, 2005).

Nonetheless, the workshop was said, at least, to help staff develop a common understanding of the issues related to countering homophobia.

While leadership from senior staff in the case study schools enabled homophobia to be seen as a problem to be addressed across a school, middle managers, such as subject coordinators, also made an important contribution. Their professional leadership helped programmes of PSHE and Citizenship to be extended, particularly in the boys' and girls' schools, to include homophobia. Experienced and knowledgeable teachers were central to the provision of good quality PSHE and Citizenship provision in each school. Participatory and interactive styles of teaching and learning were prioritised over didactic and transmission models. PSHE and Citizenship took place not only in classrooms, but also, for example, utilised a Theatre in Education Company and supported pupils in making contributions to assemblies. With regard to content, pupils were encouraged, particularly, to consider the harms caused by homophobia and homophobic bullying. In the boys' school, especially, pupils were asked to consider what life might be like for a gay pupil at the school and what could be done to make his experience better.

The purpose of teaching about homophobia in the case study schools appeared to be at least threefold. First, pupils were encouraged not to be homophobic – that is, not to intentionally (or even unintentionally) harm other pupils. Furthermore, they appeared to be expected to contribute to the promotion of a wider ethos of care in the school and to actively discourage homophobia. Second, pupils were encouraged to distinguish homophobia as a set of structural and institutional influences from individual's personal feelings about same-sex sexuality. It was recognised that some pupils, perhaps for class, ethnicity, cultural or religious influences, might take a particular stance in relation to homosexuality. Third, lessons were organised to

promote discussion and dialogue so that pupils had a way of communicating with each other – and with staff – about sexuality-related topics and issues.

While teachers proscribed and prescribed certain positions with regard to homophobia – one respondent, for example, stated that it was unacceptable and highly racist to allow homophobia among African-Caribbean boys – pupils were able to develop their own positions with regard to same-sex relationships. Indeed, when an external visitor to the girls' school ran a session on homophobia and same-sex sexuality with pupils, it was felt by the teacher that this could have been facilitated in a more open-minded way to acknowledge that some of the girls did not accept same-sex relationships.

There appeared among staff to be a degree of ambivalence as to whether an individual teachers' lesbian or gay identity should be made known to pupils. One respondent in the boys' school who had, on a carefully considered occasion, made it known to pupils that he was gay, felt that this had enabled one pupil to talk about his same-sex sexual feelings. In addition, pupils who were not gay or bisexual themselves, now alerted this teacher if they had concerns about the welfare of a gay or bisexual pupil. However, this same respondent also noted that he personally still felt 'scared' when talking about his sexual identity, not least because he was uncertain whether this was thought acceptable among senior staff. In the girls' school, the position of senior staff was more clearly articulated – teachers should not, on the whole, talk about their personal lives or their personal relationships. Although this made it difficult for the girls to identify positive role models (as they might, say, with a Black teacher), this was seen to be compensated for by a firm approach to dealing with homophobia clearly and fairly.

In all of the case study schools, respondents indicated that there should be greater visibility of programmes and activities to address homophobia. This could, as in the co-educational school for example, include more information about local services for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people. It might also, as in the girls' school, be about

extending the Citizenship curriculum to ensure that recent legislative changes (such as those relating to same-sex civil partnerships) be included. And it also included, as in the boys' school, articulating more clearly the links between addressing homophobia, the *Every Child Matters* five outcomes, supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of pupils, and improving behaviour, attendance and achievement. One respondent echoed the views of a number of other teachers when stating that homophobia could not be addressed once only as a stand alone issue – prejudice and discrimination associated with it pervaded many aspects of school life and, culturally, homophobia had to it a degree of persistence.

In addressing homophobia, staff appeared to do so in ways that echoed the characteristics associated with effective schools (Sammons et al, 1995; Reed and Lodge, 2006). For example, there was leadership from senior staff, an attempt to build a shared vision and goals, the provision of professional development events and high expectations of students. However, although respondents were clear that they wanted to promote inclusion and counter bullying, they also spoke of the challenges of countering homophobia and of being open about same-sex sexuality issues – not least among staff. While some staff were keen to promote a vision of equal opportunities that included sexuality, respondents reported that not all staff shared this vision. A collegial and participative approach to school improvement may require that firmer action is taken to promote inclusion with regard to lesbian and gay staff (Nixon, 2006).

Views of pupils

Bullying, teasing, 'mucking about' and 'cussing'

Homophobic bullying was reported by some pupils to be related to certain signs of difference – perhaps associated with the wearing the wrong sorts of clothes (such as pink ankle socks for boys, or 'walking a bit different' or, as reported in the girls school, for listening to music other than R&B). However, most pupils also reported that the use of the word 'gay' was used routinely to apply to most anything thought to be bad.

Thus, being given detention was 'gay'. So too was not wishing to spend time with friends after school or if someone was being annoying or perceived to be behaving stupidly.

Among some pupils, but not all, this extension of the use of 'gay' was viewed somewhat negatively – with some pupils questioning why the word always denoted something 'wrong'. Pupils at the boys school, for example, felt that the routine use of the word in this way could have a particularly negative impact on pupils who were gay themselves, or who had family members who were gay.

As some pupils pointed out, the word 'gay' was used in at least two ways – the first was more associated with intent to cause harm, the second was more akin to teasing, 'mucking about' or 'cussing', as it was also called by pupils.

Some pupils in the coeducational school reported that the line between teasing and bullying was sometimes crossed when, for example, a pupil responded tearfully to being called a lesbian. If such a 'weak spot' was found, pupils might exploit the entertainment value in this – something in which respondents from the year 10 girls group in the coeducational school would not wish to involve themselves.

The term 'homophobia' generally conjured up images of prejudice against gay men – although some pupils noted that it could apply to lesbians too. Pupils often stated that they were against such prejudice and discrimination, although in the single-sex school in particular there were concerns expressed about lesbian or gay pupils. Such concerns were sometimes related to lesbian and gay pupils who were reported to have made unwanted sexual advances on their heterosexual classmates. Some pupils reported that the expression of same-sex desire, whether personally experienced or witnessed (such as seeing two people of the same sex kissing) made them feel uncomfortable. However, there was also discussion among some pupils which questioned whether lesbian and gay pupils would act in this way – with some pupils from the boys' school arguing that heterosexual boys were more likely to act

publically in such a manner. Furthermore, and in the girls' school, a few pupils joked that they would not wish to see heterosexuals being overly intimate in public.

A number of pupils spoke about the extent to which pupils might experience homophobia if they were to identify openly as lesbian or gay while at school. Although a few lesbian, gay or bisexual pupils were known to respondents and were not believed to have experienced homophobic bullying, the school was not perceived to be a supportive place for such pupils. Respondents seemed able to make a distinction between recognising their schools as settings in which pupils were, in a number of ways, protected from harm, and realising that the promotion of well-being with regard to same-sex sexualities was inadequate.

Influencing homophobia

Although pupils recognised the impact of religion on people's views about same-sex relationships, pupils stated that their own views were more influenced by personal contact, the media and, for some pupils at least, issues addressed at school.

Some respondents stated that they were generally comfortable about issues related to same-sex sexuality as a result of knowing personally gay men or, more rarely, lesbians. Pupils in each of the schools had relatives (mothers or sisters, for example) who knew gay men who they invited into the family, or other relatives (perhaps an aunt or an uncle) who were themselves lesbian or gay. Although students reported having some homophobic relatives, on balance pupils across all three schools mostly adopted a 'live and let live' approach. Through celebrities or characters in the media, pupils were said to have 'got used' to seeing lesbians and gay men.

Pupils also mentioned a production by a Theatre In Education Company addressing homophobic bullying. At the girls' school, in particular, this had produced excitement and discussion. However, pupils at the co-educational and the girls' school found it difficult, (on the whole, but not altogether), to identify specific elements of teaching related to homophobia and same-sex sexuality. This contrasted markedly with pupils

at the boys' school who valued the 'long discussions' they had had about homophobia and 'being gay' during PSHE classes.

Pupils also indicated that concerns about homophobia and expressions of it might relate to being in a single sex school. In the boys' school, for example, pupils suggested that homophobia would be less if girls were present – the suggestion being that girls would contribute to an ethos more accepting of sexual diversity. In the girls' school, respondents felt that boys would be more violent than girls in their response to a pupil being open about their same-sex attraction.

Looking to the future, pupils were generally agreed that work to address homophobia in school should continue. Addressing stereotypes, promoting 'fairness' and equality, creating opportunities for discussion and providing support to lesbian and gay pupils were highlighted as concrete steps to be undertaken. However, some pupils, particularly boys, suggested that their involvement in activities to counter homophobia would be circumscribed by the extent to which activities were made public across the school – such as taking part in an anti-homophobia activity during assembly. Boys indicated that the stigma associated with homosexuality might lead them to 'get grief' and perhaps act less supportively than they would in situations with friends who were also more or less accepting of same-sex relationships.

Conclusions and implications

As noted in the Introduction, much has changed with regard to sexuality over the past 20 years. In England, new legislation, new policies, new programmes and new forms of professional practice are having an influence on the willingness and capacity of schools to counter homophobia.

Such changes might best be seen with regard to broad cultural, societal and global factors that are shaping education generally (Maguire, 2002) and have shaped views about sexualities and same-sex sexualities in particular (Parker & Aggleton, 2007; Weeks, 2007). Weeks (2007), for example, highlights 15 'unfinished revolutions (...)

that have remade the world of sexuality and intimacy...' (p.7). These include those associated with gender, the broadening of reproductive rights, the recognition of sexual diversity, the recognition of sexual violence and abuse, the expansion of sexual/intimate citizenship, the continued circulation of power around race and ethnicity, class and age, and the commercialisation of the erotic. Matters of 'sexuality' are being increasingly understood with regard, not only to personal health and well-being (Meyer & Northbridge, 2007), but also to concepts of social justice and human rights (Parker & Aggleton, 2007; Saiz, 2007; Teunis & Herdt, 2007; Plummer, 2006).

Concurrently, attention has focused on the ways that schools might best promote progressive and socially just pedagogy, person-centred education, democracy and human rights (Maguire, 2005; Fielding, 2007; Anderson & Ronson, 2005; Greene, 2006; Reid, 2004; Rhoads & Calderone, 2007). Over the last ten years in particular, there has been a range of legislative reforms and policies 'built around ideas of social justice, equality of opportunity and a degree of respect for the human rights of individuals and diverse social groups' (Harris, 2007: 33).

Promoting democratic values and practices, responding to pupils' needs, concerns and interests, ensuring pupils are safe, and promoting their social and emotional well-being are increasingly being seen as intimately related, not only to effective learning (Ofsted, 2007), but also to the wider improvement of the school in which they learn (MacGilchrist et al, 2004; Reed & Lodge, 2006; Fielding, 2007) and to building the communities and societies in which they live and work (Apple & Beane, 2007; Reid, 2004).

In the case study schools, pupils spoke about homophobia in complex ways, discussing issues related to sexual meanings, sexual identities and sexual communities, images of masculinity and femininity, concepts of power, sexuality-related discrimination and sexual rights (*cf.* Parker & Aggleton, 2007). They were generally keen to counter homophobia or, at least, not to be associated with harms that could be caused through its deployment. Some pupils had learned specifically about homophobia

through school-based activities. However, and in line with theories regarding young people's 'post-traditional' identities, as important an influence on many pupils were understandings about homophobia and same-sex sexualities learned through the media, interactions with friends and family, and in relation to broader concerns to promote fairness and social justice.

Pupils were often aware, too, of the heteronormative cultures of schools (Epstein, 1998; Purohit & Walsh, 2003) – even if this was not the term they themselves used. Some pupils, particularly boys, were concerned about adopting a stance that was explicitly anti-homophobic, especially in the presence of other boys who did not share their views. Some girls, although stating that they were concerned about the expression of lesbian sexuality, noted the unfair ways in which lesbians and gay men were treated. And, even though pupils had witnessed little if any homophobic bullying in their school, none felt their school would necessarily be a safe and supportive place for lesbian and gay pupils.

In schools, discussion and dialogue is 'not automatically (...) a democratic, empowering and enriching process' (DePalma, 2007: 131) and can suppress certain kinds of knowledge, including that related to sexuality (O'Flynn & Epstein, 2005). Heterosexist assumptions, for example, can even be embedded into subjects, such as science education, that might appear relatively neutral and value free when compared to PSHE and SRE (Reiss, 2007).

So, in what ways might schools extend and tailor their work to ensure that countering homophobia becomes an integral part of fulfilling the aims of the new secondary national curriculum, that is, to assist all young people to be successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens?²² Four areas are considered here: making the most of national policy and guidance; tying work on homophobia to school

²² Information about the purpose, values and aims of the secondary national curriculum which was introduced in September 1st 2007 is available at: <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/index.aspx> Accessed 6th October, 2007.

improvement processes; extending sex and relationships education through the promotion of sexual literacy; and teaching about same-sex sexuality as a non-controversial issue.

Making the most of national policy and programmes

In case study schools, staff demonstrated a commitment to using national policies and guidance to address homophobia, focusing particularly on equal opportunities but also highlighting the ambitions of *Every Child Matters*. There are currently at least a dozen national policies, programmes and initiatives through which homophobia in schools could be tackled (Warwick et al, 2006) including *Every Child Matters*, the *National Healthy School Programme* (NHSP), the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* and the *Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement*.

The *National Healthy School Programme* and the introduction of Citizenship as a curriculum subject together provide schools with an ‘... impetus towards health and citizenship – towards on the one hand good physical and mental health, and on the other a respect for personal integrity and worth.’ (Warwick et al, 2001: 139). To this must be added the impetus provided by *Every Child Matters*, with its broad concern to protect children and young people from harm and to promote their health and well-being, their ability to achieve, their involvement in (and contribution to) community and society and their economic well-being (DfES, 2004)

Furthermore, new programmes of study associated with PSHE at key stages three and four encourage teachers to assist students to ‘explore similarities and differences between people and discuss social and moral dilemmas [and to] learn to deal with challenges and accommodate diversity in all its forms’ (QCA, 2007: 254) – including that related to sexual orientation.

There was, however, further action to take in case study schools. In particular, one staff respondent noted feeling less than protected by the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003). Supporting the welfare and well-being of

lesbian and gay staff may well be an essential component of addressing homophobia across a school and 'out' lesbian and gay staff – when working in a supportive context – may be in a strong position to help challenge homophobia (Lugg, 2003; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Litton, 2001).

School improvement through preventing homophobia

The three schools involved in this study were judged to be very effective by Ofsted, being particularly strong in creating inclusive cultures which promoted students personal, social and cultural development. Schools demonstrated a commitment to self-improvement and, as part of this, to addressing homophobia through identifying it as a problem, providing staff training and extending school policies and programmes of work (PSHE and Citizenship in particular).

Staff respondents in the case study schools demonstrated that programmes and activities to address homophobia and homophobic bullying did not stand alone. They noted that actions to address homophobia should form the backbone of teachers' professional practice, even if in case study schools this was not always achieved in practice. Staff sought to create and renew structures, processes and a curriculum that promoted broadly democratic values and principles. They were concerned with the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities, concerned for the welfare of others and had a degree of faith in the individual and collective capacity among staff and pupils to discuss and resolve issues (Apple & Beane, 2007). Still, there remained a sense that much remained to be done. Some staff were reported being committed and able to counter homophobia and homophobic bullying, others, although committed, were reported to be unsure what to do, and others, some said to be adopting a religious stance, continued to view same-sexuality as sinful, wrong or a passing phase among pupils.

In placing pupils' health and well-being at the heart of policy and practice in England (DfES, 2004a; DfES, 2004b) there is an increasing concern to engage with pupils' learning as a part of school improvement (Reed & Lodge, 2006; DfES, 2006). While

engaging with sexuality in schools may be challenging for some, it is nonetheless essential in creating and sustaining a sense of democratic school practice that is inclusive of all (Rofes, 2005).

Extending Sex and Relationship Education – promoting Sexual Literacy

Although there are moves to encourage pupils to express their views on a range of matters of concern to them, pupils – both girls and boys, and including those from Black and minority ethnic communities – are reported to want more and better opportunities to learn about relationships and sexuality than they currently experience. Sex and relationships education in schools is often reported as being too little, too late and too unrelated to young people's own lives (Buston & Wight, 2002; Buston & Wight, 2006).

Given the complex ways in which pupils in case study schools often discussed sexuality and homophobia and given the changing sexual worlds and identities of young people and the understandings, ideas, needs, concerns and interests they bring with them to their school (Johansson, 2007; Stone & Ingham, 2006) it may be timely to consider how best to extend what is currently termed 'Sex and Relationship Education' (SRE).

Guidance for schools on SRE, published some seven years ago (DfEE, 2000), notes that sex and relationship education should assist pupils to learn about three broad areas: attitudes and values; personal and social skills; and knowledge and understanding – and takes a somewhat individualistic, perhaps interpersonal view of relationships rather than a social, cultural and historical perspective. If schools are to engage with the understandings of relationships and sexuality held by young people and to assist them to be successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens, they will need to have the ideas and means to discuss (same-sex) sexuality(ies), that is to be more 'literate' with regard to sexuality-related issues.

The concept of sexual literacy, as developed by the National Sexuality Research Center (NSRC) in the USA, is defined as, '... the knowledge and skills needed to promote and

protect sexual wellness – having healthy intimate relationships, being able to prevent disease, understanding sexuality beyond just the act of sex.’ (Herdt, 2007: 17).

Although it is difficult to gauge whether the concept has relevance, utility and currency outside the USA, notions of sexual literacy may provide a way to assist schools in England engage more constructively with issues of sexuality and sexual health.

For example, some of the recent literature on health literacy (on which notions of sexual literacy draw) identifies three forms that it can take (Nutbeam, 2000; see also Zarcadoolas et al, 2005)

With basic/functional health literacy, people have sufficient basic skills to function effectively in everyday situations (in regard to health, for example, to read prescriptions, appointment cards, and medicine labels). With communicative/interactive literacy, people are able ‘to extract information and derive meaning from different forms of communication, and to apply new information to changing circumstances.’ (Nutbeam, 2000: 264). With critical literacy, people are able ‘...to critically analyse information, and to use this information to exert greater control over their life events and situations’ (Nutbeam, 2000: 264).

The concept of sexual literacy draws not only from health, but also from educational theory. Critical literacy has, through the work of Paulo Freire (1970) for example, been linked to emancipation, to self- and social-empowerment. Literacy has also been theorised ‘as a form of cultural politics [that] assumes that the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of everyday life are the primary categories for understanding contemporary schooling’ (Giroux, 1988: 69). More recently, Rowan et al (2002) have noted that educational programmes that locate literacy practices in social and cultural contexts have the potential to problematise taken-for-granted assumptions about gender by recognising the differences and commonalities between some girls and some boys as well as identifying the diversity within groups of girls and boys.

While the biological aspects of sexuality and reproduction are important to know, sexual literacy could, for example, be allied with the promotion of tolerance, diversity and difference (Sears, 1997). Within a democratic school context, to talk successfully and act confidently and responsibly about relationships and sexuality would necessitate an understanding of, for example, the ways that gender, ethnicity and class shape and influence organisational and interpersonal dynamics. There is a cultural politics of sexuality in schools, communities and societies about which staff and pupils could learn and with which they could purposefully engage.

Same-sex sexuality as non-controversial

Sexual orientation and homophobia, or probably more accurately, 'homosexuality', is said to be a controversial issue to address in schools (Hand, 2007). In part, this is a legacy of a range of earlier national policies and guidance – including Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act – which centralised control over education regarding sex education and stated that homosexuality was unacceptable and definitely not to be promoted, encouraged, or presented as the norm in schools (Warwick et al, 2001; Pilcher, 2005; Monk, 2001). Furthermore, teaching about homo- and bisexuality can be seen as a threat to cultural and religious values; at the national level '... prescription over matters that might cause offence' Harris (2007) notes, 'appears deliberately to have been avoided, and so the decision about these matters is delegated to schools, which are expected to sensitive to the wishes and mores of local ethnic or religious community groups.' (p. 413).

That said, in the case study schools, staff and pupils often spoke about *homophobia*, not *homosexuality*, as unacceptable. And pupils in particular, often spoke about same-sex sexuality in a matter of fact way – the lives of lesbians and gay men perhaps now being viewed as more ordinary than extraordinary (*cf.* Weeks, 2007) in this kind of context. It may be timely to consider whether schools should adopt a position of teaching about same-sex sexualities as 'non-controversial'.

In teaching about 'controversial' issues, teachers are usually expected to present rival moral positions as even-handedly as possible (Hand, 2007). While this may correlate with pupils' beliefs, it does not, in Hand's view, properly engage pupils with 'the established arguments for the moral illegitimacy of homosexual acts [which] quickly buckle under the pressure of rational examination' (Hand, 2007: 84).

The three main established arguments (or types of arguments) for the moral illegitimacy of homosexual acts are, according to Hand (2007): '(i) arguments from scriptural authority, which infer the wrongness of homosexual acts from their prohibition in certain sacred texts; (ii) the so-called 'perverted faculty' argument, which asserts that the biological functions of sexual organs places restrictions on their morally and biologically legitimate use; and (iii) the more recent natural law argument (...) which finds homosexual acts to be incompatible with the realization of 'basic human goods'.' (Hand, 2007: 77)

Countering these arguments, Hand (2007) first states there to be, for example, a variety of Biblical injunctions that are not morally sound – such as purchasing slaves from neighbouring countries, selling female children into slavery and wearing garments of two types of cloth. 'Similar consideration could be advanced', Hand (2007) states, 'to any of the sacred texts venerated by faith communities of the world' (p.78). Hand (2007) counters the second argument by arguing that many objects are used in ways other than their original or putatively main function. Tables are sat upon, books used for the pressing of flowers, things picked up with feet and hands used to walk with – all without moral objection. With respect to the third argument, Hand (2007) asks why should bodily pleasure be viewed so negatively when other pleasures – such as those associated with art and with food, for example – are not viewed as morally unsound?

Although not an excuse to ignore, discount or downplay pupils' understandings and beliefs, Hand's argument for non-controversiality can be read as a school moving to

adopt a position which is seen to value same-sex sexualities and in which staff have a place to argue from, and for, that position.

Using findings in my professional practice

Before outlining how I might use the findings from this study in my professional practice I would like to identify a few issues that make the findings of this study – as with the production of social knowledge more generally – contingent and perspectival (Becker, 1998).

The case study schools were selected, purposively (Robson, 2002), to exemplify what *can* happen when there is commitment to counter homophobia and bullying, rather than what does happen in schools across England. The views of staff and pupils in the case study schools may be somewhat exceptional. The schools were also, as judged by Ofsted, to be ‘good’, ‘very good’ or ‘very effective’ overall – with good provision made for pupils’ personal and social development. Other schools may not have established such effective environments for inclusion, learning and discussion. In this respect, at least, case study schools may be different from the norm, being positioned at the pole of ‘good practice’ locally and perhaps nationally.

In addition, many pupils reported that, through family and friends, they personally knew lesbian and gay people – not necessarily a situation which would exist outside of large, inner-city settings. Finally, although there may have been lesbian, gay or bisexual pupils in the groups interviewed, this was not known explicitly. It remains open to question whether ‘out’ pupils would provide a different view about homophobia in their school. The views of the gay PSHE teacher, for example, provided a distinct perspective on the challenges still facing the school. The views of lesbian and gay pupils are likely to make a valuable contribution to the ways that those in their school might best continue their efforts to counter homophobia.

So, in what ways might I use the findings from this study to extend my current and future professional practice?

First, there are positive findings to report to academic, policy and practitioner audiences about the achievements of case study schools with regard to challenging and preventing homophobia and homophobic bullying. While it would be unrealistic to suggest that all schools can adopt the approaches used by these case study schools there may be findings from the case studies that teachers can transfer or extrapolate (Patton, 1999) to their own context.

Second, articles for refereed academic and practitioner journals will be prepared to ensure a lasting legacy of the study findings. This would also have the potential to make findings known internationally. To date, there is little work internationally which reports on the successes of work in schools to challenge homophobic bullying.

Third, consultancy and training, or professional development activities, could be developed to support teachers to make best use of the findings. This could, for example, build on the relationship established with the *LGB Centre* in South London that assisted with the identification of case study schools. Work with local and regional coordinators attached to the *National Healthy School Programme*, for example, could assist with the development of work in schools to promote emotional health and well-being and to prevent bullying.

Fourth, guidance on policy could be provided to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). A report of progress on the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES, 2006) notes that the Department should be working towards 'A just society, where outcomes are determined by aptitude and ambition, not by circumstances of birth' and 'A safe, cohesive society, with young people entering adulthood able to make a positive contribution' (DfES, 2006: 3). Tackling homophobia should be seen as one element of assisting the DCSF to work towards these ambitions.

Fifth, there are likely to be a number of questions for research that arise from this study. What, for example, are the experiences and perceptions of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils in the schools where particular efforts are being made to challenge homophobia? What role do lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers play in developing and

implementing anti-homophobia programmes and activities? What happens to work on homophobia if leadership from senior management is lost (such as where members of senior management teams driving the work leave the school)? What more could teachers do to better support pupils who wish to make a stand against homophobia and homophobic bullying? Do particular sets of factors need to be already in place in schools (such as an inclusive ethos) prior to homophobia being challenged? In what ways might schools with existing high levels of violence counter homophobic incidents? Do schools with intakes of pupils drawn from rural or suburban locations face different challenges when addressing homophobia? In addition, further study is needed to identify the type of talk (Arnot & Reay, 2007) in which young people are engaged when discussing homophobia. Although some pupils appeared to be influenced by what they had experienced outside of the school, their responses appeared also to be influenced by the conversational 'rules' of particular subjects – such as PSHE and Citizenship. The relationship between pedagogic voices and social identities requires further exploration.

On a more personal note, I begun this study hoping to tell a more positive story about homophobia and schools than the one I frequently heard at conferences and meetings and too often read in journals, books and the lesbian and gay media. Schools were portrayed as routinely homophobic settings with imagery of victimised, suicidal young people conjured up to press home the point.

What I did not expect to find were teachers and pupils quite so accomplished in challenging and countering homophobia. One teacher, for example, spoke of being proud of the pupils in their demonstration, with humour, of concerns about homophobia and their desire for fairness. By the end of one group interview I felt moved by what I had heard and wondered whether in other schools, given similar circumstances and opportunities, other pupils could be just as informed and articulate.

Not to be naive, there are many schools in which homophobia and homophobic bullying continues to affect young people (Stonewall, 2007). Yet, there are also young people – not necessarily lesbian or gay themselves – who resist and counter homophobia and the harm it causes. Professionally and politically, we should be minded to acknowledge, to make more widely known and perhaps to celebrate what those in schools are achieving. Through this study and the further work associated with it, I hope I can contribute to doing just that.

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Appendices – Discussion guides

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Homophobia, bullying and schools

Senior Leadership Group

- To date, a number of resources have been produced which aim to support schools to address homophobia in general and homophobic bullying in particular.
 - Yet, these rarely make mention of the factors that often hinder schools from addressing homophobia – resistance from certain people in schools or the influence of strong homophobic cultures in schools and the strategies and tactics adopted to maintain or challenge such cultures these.
 - The overall aim of the study is to generate new understandings about the ways in which schools have, or have not, been able to address homophobia (and homophobic bullying).
 - Information will be collected from three case study schools.
 - All information will be held confidentially and reported anonymously. All data will only be used only for the study.
-
- To assist with data collection and analysis, do you agree to the interview being tape recorded?

Background

1. Could you say a little about yourself and your work
2. Could you say a little about what homophobia is and whether it has affected your school?

Focusing on homophobia

3. What sorts of things have been done to address homophobia in the school?
4. In what ways does work to address homophobia fit into other work in the school?
 - a. Drivers?
5. What changes did think might come about as a result of the work on homophobia?
 - a. Positive? Negative?

Review and reflection

6. In terms of carrying out the work
 - a. What has helped?
 - b. What has hindered?
 - c. (Culture of the school, others' reactions, your own skills and expertise, other things?)
7. Are there things you could point to that show what changes have come about?
 - a. Among students, staff, and others?
 - b. Anticipated changes
 - c. Unanticipated changes (positive and negative)

Looking to the future

8. What further activities, if any, need to take place to further address homophobia?
9. If you were asked to share what you had learned about addressing homophobia with senior leaders at another school, what key points would you make?
10. Are there any specific messages about homophobia you would like to send?
 - a. Messages to Ofsted? DfES? DH? Governors? Others?
11. Is there anything about addressing homophobia in your school that you feel has not been covered and you would like to add?

Thank you

Homophobia, bullying and schools

Lead teacher

- To date, a number of resources have been produced which aim to support schools to address homophobia in general and homophobic bullying in particular.
- Yet, these rarely make mention of the factors that often hinder schools from addressing homophobia – resistance from certain people in schools or the influence of strong homophobic cultures in schools and the strategies and tactics adopted to maintain or challenge such cultures these.
- The overall aim of the study is to generate new understandings about the ways in which schools have, or have not, been able to address homophobia (and homophobic bullying).
- Information will be collected from three case study schools.
- All information will be held confidentially and reported anonymously. All data will only be used only for the study.
- To assist with data collection and analysis, do you agree to the interview being tape recorded?

Background

1. Could you say a little about yourself and your work
2. Could you say a little about what homophobia is and whether it has affected your school?

Focusing on homophobia

3. What led you to carry out work to address homophobia?
 - a. Key incident? Part of programme of work? Culture of school?
4. What were the steps you took to begin this work?
5. What sorts of things have been done to address homophobia in the school?
 - a. How fits into other areas of work?
6. What changes did think might come about as a result of the work on homophobia?
 - a. Positive? Negative?

Review and reflection

7. In terms of carrying out the work
 - a. What helped? Drivers?
 - b. What hindered?
 - c. (Culture of the school, others' reactions, your own skills and expertise, other things?)

8. Are there things you could point to that show what changes have come about?
 - a. Among students, staff, and others?
 - b. Anticipated changes
 - c. Unanticipated changes (positive and negative)

Looking to the future

9. What further activities, if any, need to take place to further address homophobia?
 - a. Others? Self?
10. If you were asked to share what you had learned about addressing homophobia with teachers in another school, what key points would you make?
11. Are there any specific messages about homophobia you would like to send?
 - a. Messages to senior leadership group? Governors? Others?
12. Is there anything about addressing homophobia in your school that you feel has not been covered and you would like to add?

Thank you

Homophobia, bullying and schools

Pupils

- To date, a number of resources have been produced which aim to support schools to address homophobia in general and homophobic bullying in particular.
- Yet, these rarely make mention of the factors that often hinder schools from addressing homophobia – resistance from certain people in schools or the influence of strong homophobic cultures in schools and the strategies and tactics adopted to maintain or challenge such cultures these.
- The overall aim of the study is to generate new understandings about the ways in which schools have, or have not, been able to address homophobia (and homophobic bullying).
- Information will be collected from three case study schools.
- All information will be held confidentially and reported anonymously. All data will only be used only for the study.
- To assist with data collection and analysis, do you agree to the interview being tape recorded?

Background

1. Could you say a little about your thoughts about the school?
 - a. Helps you do your best?
 - i. What things are done to help you do your best?
 - b. Enjoyable place to be?
 - i. Looking forward to things/not looking forward to things
 - c. Safe place to be? Fair place to be?

Focusing on homophobia

2. I'm interested in any work you may have done about homophobia
 - a. Understandings of it?
 - b. What sorts of things have you done?
3. What do you think of it? – Good points and things that could be better?
 - c. In doing the work, do you feel you are being made to agree with a particular viewpoint?
4. Since doing this work – has it made any difference?
 - d. Among students? Among staff? Others?

Looking to the future

5. Is there anything else that needs to happen now? What?
6. If you were in charge of things, what changes would you wish to make?
 - e. Self, people around you, society at large?

Thank you